Spring 2015

Sewing the Tiger's Stripes Back On: Examining Dress and the "Female Other"

Allison Green
Skidmore College

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Honor Thesis

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I've been seduced by the Moulin Rouge, World Fairs, the Isabella Stuart Gardener Museum, Wunderkammers, and the world of parasols and painted fans. I read the story the Western world told without questioning it and cherished its opulent beauty. I loved what I was looking at but my art historical education has deepened my understanding of *what* I was looking at, Orientalism, and its partners exoticism and primitivism, all of which particularly project onto the female image. My own art appreciation has turned into an urgency to deconstruct and reassess history and ideas through material culture. Othering and alterity studies offer stories yet untold because they belong to the outsiders and the silent members of society.

So birthed the desire to research Othered female bodies in problematic spaces. I chose to focus on costume and dress for the female Other during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, because with the development of the Impressionist movement, the rise of museums, and other decadent moments of Western culture, these eras had seemed the most alluring for so long. I begin this examination of female Other dress with case studies of Mata Hari's and Josephine Baker's performance costumes. I set these female dancers in the framework of imperial Othering and discuss agency, eroticism, and the so-called exotic and primitive.

All these concepts emerged for me again as the Theater Department asked me to design the costumes for the spring 2015 Black Box production of Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad*. I realized that the twelve principle characters, Penelope of *The Odyssey's* twelve handmaidens, fit into the problematic construct of female Others and decided to use them as an additional case study. In order to marry my costume design endeavor with my research on imperialist images of female Others from Hari's and Baker's times, I sought reference from the contemporary art world. As a connecting thread, I discovered Amy Cutler's work weaves together the concepts of Othered female bodies that direct my case studies of Hari and Baker, and the questions of female agency when considering Otherness and dress found in *The Penelopiad*. Cutler's work, although illustrated rather than performed as Hari, Baker, *and* Atwood's work are, serves as an exemplary comparison between the two studies because her focus on the female form and dress do not simply suggest the female Other but re-address and evolve her into a less fraught image. I used the affirmative spirit of her work to inspire my designs for *The Penelopiad* and to propose a solution to the problems I establish in my studies of Hari and Baker.

This project, then, consists of three key components. The first appears as a research paper devoted to analyzing female Other costume through Mata Hari and Josephine Baker, and then establishes Amy Cutler as the necessary next step in revising the female Other image. The second consisted of my designs and constructions that became the costumes for Skidmore's *The Penelopiad*. The third serves as a narrative review of *The Penelopiad* in which I discuss the production's significance to the overall topic and apply Cutler's principles to explore the possibilities of creating less-problematic female Other dress.

“Spinning Yarns and Weaving Shrouds: Agency and Otherness in Skidmore’s Production of Margaret Atwood’s *The Penelopiad”*

Alli Green

Foundations

Introduction:

> *The thirteen women wear scraps of leather hand-stitched over bustier bras, skirts of cowhide, tangled trains of fisherman's net, ripped nightgowns, peeling layers of antique lace, and fraying skirts of muslin taken from a box labeled "insane asylum wear."*
>
> *They dance with ropes that later kill them.*
>
> *They sing "an echo of an echo of an echo of an echo of an echo of an echo of an echo."*

Margaret Atwood describes her 2007 stage retelling of *The Odyssey*, called *The Penelopiad,* as "an echo of an echo of an echo of an echo of an echo of an echo" that began with "the explosion" of the Trojan War.[1] Not for the first time, Atwood, author of the satirical short story "Rape Fantasies" and dystopian novel *The Handmaiden's Tale*, narrates a recognizable world from the perspective of women thrust into fraught, powerless positions. *The Penelopiad* in fact gives voices to not only Odysseus's faithful wife, Penelope, who narrates the play, but to her twelve handmaidens who appear barely as footnotes in Homer's original poem. In *The Penelopiad,* Atwood's "sixth echo," the story distances itself not only from the original historical narrative, but also from its antiquated ideas about female identity, agency and treatment.

This spring, Skidmore offered a seventh echo through its student-designed and produced black box production of Atwood's play. A design team of senior students approached the provocative text with a series of questions that began with: why do we put this show on today? How do we depict a classical world falling apart? How do we give voices—even if echoed voices—to a group that represents thousands of years of forced silence? And most importantly for my role in the production as costume designer, who are "The Maids?" What do they look like and what does that say?

[1] Margaret Atwood, "Author's Introduction" in *The Penelopiad* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2007).

Audience members later described the production's cast as looking "shipwrecked," "oppressed," "distressed," yet also "tactile," "touchable," and "sexy."[2] Up for interpretation remain the thirteen women's agency, identity, and relatability on stage. And so I organized a series of conversations with the director, actresses, designers, seamstresses, design students, and audience members to help unpack these ideas. After reading the script, I quickly saw an alliance between *The Penelopiad* and the case studies on female "otherness" in dress and costume that I had been researching. In the following discussion, I endeavor to weave together my previous work on female Other dress, Atwood's dark text, and the insights of students involved in Skidmore's production of *The Penelopiad*.

Just as Atwood spotlights the problematic depiction of women in the classical world, my research has sought to highlight the problematic images of "othered" female bodies in dress. And again like Atwood, my goal was not to stop at identifying a problem but to continue by proposing a solution or perhaps an evolution. Thanks to Atwood, the maids have names: Melantho, Kerthia, Iole, Tanis, Celandine, Klytie, Chloris, Zoe, Selene, Alecto, Phasiana, and Narcissa. And thanks to the costumes, they have their own bodies.

The Design Team and Our Missions:

The design team's very first task was to become familiar with Atwood's play; we then dissected it together and selected major themes to lay as our cornerstone. We familiarized ourselves with the plots of both the *The Odyssey* and *The Penelopiad*, the sources from which Atwood wrote her piece, and the relevance of the show for Skidmore's stage.

The Penelopiad, originally a 2005 novella adapted for the stage in 2007, retells *The Odyssey* from the perspective of the hero's faithful wife, Penelope, including her twenty years spent waiting for him to return from Troy. Penelope's legacy as a pious model for female behavior, and even the generous contemporary interpretation of her as an intelligent woman of

[2] Conversation with the class of Costume Design, TH 238, Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, NY, March 2015.

agency come into question in Atwood's play, as it becomes clear that not strictly Penelope narrates. Her twelve handmaidens create the chorus; the maids exist briefly in *The Odyssey* as Penelope's nightly helpers who assist her in unweaving the shroud she weaves each day as a way to stall her advancing suitors. In Skidmore's production, the chorus of maids also acts as the full cast of principal characters, including Odysseus, Helen of Troy, and even the suitors themselves. Atwood's story exposes the Odyssey's—and the classical world's—underbelly, complete with criticism of patriarchy, sanctioned rape, class hierarchy, and externalized/internalized misogyny.

Atwood wrote *The Penelopiad* for *The Canongate Myth Series*, a series of classical myths retold by contemporary writers in short novel form. Atwood had been long haunted by how Homer's Odyssey describes Penelope's handmaidens; in the original story, the maids help Penelope in her crafty scheme against the suitors and wind up hanged with the slaughtered suitors after Odysseus returns in triumph.[3] Their executions have remained nothing but a few lines in the Odyssey until Atwood re-inhabited the story and reimagined it from the perspective of the women who toiled by night to protect their mistress's body.

The play, then, by addressing the untold story of female oppression, remains relevant for contemporary audiences. Skidmore took on the show, selected and directed by Emily Moler '15, in support of the strong body of female undergraduate academics, and in solemn recognition of the rampant sexual misconduct culture plaguing today's college campuses. Moler stated in her proposal that the show would benefit Skidmore both from within the theater department, where the company would explore how postmodern art forms reconsider historical/contemporary issues, and throughout the campus, where the student body composing the audience could interact with these same ideas.

[3] Conversation with Director Emily Moler '15, Unofficial Production Meeting, Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, NY, February 2015.

After the initial discussion of the story, Atwood, and Moler's mission statement, the design team sat down to develop a shared aesthetic. Our guiding ideas included "deconstructing," "taking apart," and "subverting the expectations of the story." We found within the text several sets of dichotomies:

Horror vs. humor
Classical vs. contemporary
Masculine vs. feminine
Linear vs. nonlinear storytelling

And transformed these narrative dichotomies into formal visual dichotomies:

Representation vs. abstraction
Bareness vs. accumulation
Traditionally conceived beauty vs. grotesque

We all agreed to implement some version of these tensions in our individual designs. Set designer Jamie Barber '15 forwent any precious imagery of the classical world whatsoever; his set replaced cylindrical white columns with prison-grey rectangular pillars and draped the stage in panels of white fabric, as though further acknowledging our defiance against the traditional imagery of *The Odyssey* (figure 1). Lighting designer James Kuzio '15 introduced sickly green and red washes into the "daylight" of Hades (figure 2). Also on the team, Jarred Green '15 acted as composer for the seven songs in *The Penelopiad* and decided to deviate from traditional music theory principles and instead created lilting, largely minor key melodies.

Moler's first conversation with me after she asked me to serve as costume designer concerned how to avoid the taut image of thirteen ancient Greek dresses, which most previous productions had constructed. She said she wanted humor and liveliness and an overall sense of disrupting and defying the classical image. She shares my art historical background and encouraged me to implement dress and art history into my designs After this conversation, as I sifted through the racks of readymade garments s in our costume shop, I developed a stream of consciousness that helped pull the designs out of their classical setting and into the new territory that Atwood and our design team forged.

I asked myself, "who are the maids?" I knew they attended Penelope as slaves, that they were young women, attractive women, battered women. But what else? I read the text again and again. In a shared monologue, the maids describe themselves as born to "serf parents, peasant parents, and slave parents," The claim to be "snatched and stolen" from their homes.[4] So where were their homes?

This question brought me to the idea that I could combine the work of these costumes with my work on the "female other." I decided the maids might not all come from Greece; ancient slave trade penetrated different cultures and so the maid's ambiguous (and ignored) cultural origins marks the first tragedy of their existence. Their status as slaves made them class "others." I began to construct character designs that at once fit *The Penelopiad* design aesthetic of abstraction and blurring timelines, as well as a discussion on Ohering through dress. I sought to collage my knowledge of historical dress, and Orientalizing/exoticizing dress to create an elaborate collection that refused to situate itself in only one context (figure 3). I wanted the maids to emerge from the world they had created in telling their story: worlds pieced together across cultures and across time, using only the rough resources of the natural world as their clothes.

One maid wore a long, white muslin skirt, cut at a forty-five degree angle from ankle to knee and on top, a form fitting, corset-like bodice I made from grey cowhide (figure 4). Her skirt's shape, color and drape might nod to classical sculpture, but the rugged leather bodice recalls the fictionalized dress of Anglo Saxon "barbarians" who shared the ancient world.

Another had a tattered brown chemise under a distressed white jumper (figure 5). This maid's world became neoclassical, recognizable by the empire waist. The brown chemise reverses the traditional western dress idea that white clothes compose undergarments and color appears on overgowns.

[4] Atwood, *The Penelopiad,* 9.

I experimented with different silhouettes, textures, fabric manipulation techniques, and time periods. I used tactile materials such as rough, stiff hides and leathers, monk's cloth cottons and muslins with thick, rough weaves, and appliques of shredded, dip-dyed, and deliberately wrinkled laces and fabrics.

> *If they wore sensual lingerie forms, I would make them crudely with rough fabrics and patches of leather (figure 6)*
>
> *If they wore unflattering rags, those rags revealed their figures, showing "too much" leg and chest (figure 7)*
>
> *If one actress wore a recognizable classical shape, membranous layers would hand loosely, threatening to rip off (figure 8)*
>
> *If one played an enticing water nymph, I would construct her an amorphous reef-suit with mud, algae, and snarling fisherman's net (figure 9)*

Essentially, I hoped to make conspicuous how the visual dissonance between "self" and Other articulates power while using today's visual techniques (such as abstraction, and "deconstruction) to try and counter the Othering effects of certain modes of female dress. The maids, and to some extent Penelope, appear as victimized, conquered women struggling for control, not unlike the problematic images of women historically described through the western lens as "other." The maids, who describe themselves as "the dirty girls" powered with only "bodies [that] had little value," sounded familiar to me. Atwood's characters face the same challenges as the women in fictitious western images of submissive harems, Gauguin's nude Tahitians, Mata Hari "exotic, erotic" persona, and Josephine Baker's rugged, "primitive" accessibility. In all cases, the audience observes a set of women with bodies on display and bodies that somehow become "different," or "other." In this project, "other," and "victimized," or perhaps simply "mistreated" become somewhat synonymous. The maids are rape victims and slaves and therefore become other, just as the women in my previous case studies.

The garments I built strove to deconstruct rather than answer the question "who are the maids?" Do the thirteen female bodies in their textural patchwork of earthy cloths function as

harmonious unit, relatable to the audience and therefore a kind of mirror or "self?" Do their "wild" costumes emphasize their sexuality, "exoticism," and poverty therefore trapping their bodies as "other?" This production's goal, and mine, centered on addressing these questions and conceding that the Self/Other binary might remain too complex to fully resolve.

Fantasy, Humor, and Ahistoricism: Complicating the Maids

I chose these three themes to further analyze because fantasy, humor, and a historicism all contribute to Othering in tbe Western imperial tradition. Fantasy constructs misrepresented women in bathhouses, harems, and lounging with peacock feathers. Humor alleviates the Western anxiety of the threat or challenge of other cultures. And Ahistoricsm further removes the Western, male-built Other from rationality and humanity; this device makes Others trapped in a fantastical past.

I wanted to see if I could reverse these ideas and use these Othering tools to create alternative images for these women.

Fantasy:

Fantasy not only plays a significant role in classical mythology but also represents an Othering technique. A Self figure bent on constructing an Other might situate that Other in a timeless and somehow fantastical setting to further strip away the figure's reliability and validity. Therefore, *The Penelopiad* costumes could employ fantasy to further distance some characters from the audience. For the Naiad Mother character, the element of fantasy afforded me an additional chance to "de-other" or shift the "otherness" of her character. In a conversation with one student, I asked:

> How did magic function in her costume?
> How was she or was she interacting with what you might think of in terms of a "water nymph" figure?
> Why wasn't she "sexy?"
> Did having a typically sexy type appear asexually give her any different edge?

Interestingly, this first conversation about fantasy represents an instance where my design did not achieve its goal in the eyes of the viewer. The student confessed he wasn't particularly focused on the Naiad Mother. I was struck by her because I thought a beautiful water nymph would be one of the most important characters to deconstruct and render unexpected, but the student reminded me that the Naiad Mother only appears in two scenes, and only during the first half of the show. Her costume remained dimly lit, adding to her mysterious intrigue, and some of the water life details such as sponges and starfish were invisible to most of the audience.

However, as our conversation progressed, the student explained that he wasn't drawn to her image because her costume made her a personification of water, not a water spirit. Nothing caught his eye or made him think of a mermaid or nymph. This idea ironically fit my goal; her costume's rough awkwardness, asymmetry, and snarls of nets and murky sea life meant to defy the expectation that she existed as an alluring seductress of the water. By attaching her body to the underwater world she once inhabited, I sought to give her back some agency. She wouldn't emerge from the water slippery and beautiful for the benefit of her beholder, but emerge wet and caked with underwater life.

This line of discussion sparked an interesting insight. I asked the student why he thought mermaids and water nymphs always appeared as sensual seductresses, and he promptly replied that men had invented them. Ultimately the Naiad Mother, then, represents how fantasy can function to tell a different story. In the traditional version, men invent women, and in ours, women invent women.

The other fantastical element I implemented, even more abstractly, took place in my conception of the suitors (figure 10). This troop of five men played by women immediately captured my attention. The suitors might have a satirical element (see following section on humor) but ultimately, they are horrors. They take up residence in Penelope's palace while Odysseus fights in the Trojan War, harass, assault, and rape the maids on a regular basis out of

boredom, beat the truth of Penelope's scheme out the maid Melantho of the Pretty Cheeks, and make such demands and proclamations as, "bring me a lamb, I'll slaughter it myself," and "whoever wins has to fuck her to death!"[5] Therefore, my earliest thought was to make them monsters. My interpretation insisted that the suitors do not exist in the same world as the women or even the other men the in show. By making them monsters, fantasy functions as allegory. The suitors symbolize the forces that destroy all the women in the show, and by extension, destroy the women in the female Other cultural phenomenon. They represent prejudice, patriarchy, misogyny, and violence.

My inspiration for the suitors' silhouettes and textures came largely from contemporary artist Nick Cave's series of sound suits (figure 11). Keeping the general shape of the human form, Cave's sculptures introduce an intermediate category between human and nonhuman, a space Atwood's suitors clearly inhabit. I gave all the women playing suitors thick, rough, oversized cloaks to extend their girths, and then added elements to further pull them away from a read as entirely human. One suitor has an asymmetrical hump-like formation over his shoulders, drawing from the unfortunate Western convention that physical abnormalities indicate moral deviance. Another wears a poncho-like garment that makes her whole upper body a peculiar square shape, and a third has a stuffed goat head stitched onto his cloak as a hood. This third accessory nods to the stories of Jason and Hercules, two Greek heroes who, after conquering and killing a mythical beast, often appear in images as having the pelt slug over their shoulders. In the case of this suitor, however, the pelt he wears remains attached to him inviting the possibility that the fur pelt could either be a spoil of adventure or part of his anatomy. The latter read makes him the monster to be killed by a hero.

Between the Naiad mother and the suitors, fantasy plays a different role in establishing "otherness." The Naiad Mother's fantasy disappears, lessening her otherness, while the suitors'

[5] Atwood, *The Penelopiad,* 46; 48.

fantasy becomes exaggerated, emphasizing their otherness. The Naiad mother's departure from traditional imagery associated with her myth frees her somewhat from idea of an exotic seductress, extant only for the benefit of the male gaze. And the suitors, in their hyperbolized use of traditional "monster" attributes namely, additions like the overlarge hump and the goat's head, reinforces their status as monstrous "others."

Humor:

Few and far between though they are, moments of humor remain an important device in creating a more complicated rendering of the maid characters. One of Moler's chief goals in this production involved using a "meta-theatrical element," meaning visual and action-based examples that the show is, in fact, a piece of performed theater. The maids tell the story and put on the play themselves, therefore they make the costumes themselves too. This concept informed some minor decisions, such as how the maid costumes always peak out of other costumes, but additionally, imagining the maids as the costumers for their show invited the chance for garments to make fun of the wearer. If the maids construct the costumes and play the characters, Moler discussed with the cast and myself, could it be their plan to parody their assumed roles?

A light hearted example appears in the two sets of royals: Penelope's parents, the King and Queen of Sparta, and Odysseus's parents, the King and Queen of Ithaca. In one of the more humorous scenes, Penelope sits down to supper with her new in laws, King Laertes and Queen Anticlea who can supposedly "freeze the balls off Helios" (figure 12). The royals all wear excessively sparkling, lavish clothing as compared to the cast of maids. Queen Anticlea (bottom left seated) wears a comically-short t-shaped garment that deliberately fits her awkwardly, and a veiled crown the copper and black of which is meant to recall a terra-cotta pot. The absurdity of a pottery-crown makes her seem like an overstatement of classical royalty, and although the

inspiration of ancient Greek ceramics most likely did not reach the audience, her dark glittery outfit in its awkward teetering shape still roused amusement.

Additionally, humor compromises masculinity. Women in drag playing men already invites some humor, but the costumes strove to emphasize the emasculation of *The Penelopiad's* male characters. Strikingly, the father/son relationship, evident in two pairs of characters, invites laughter at the expense of the "men" on stage. Kind Laertes wears a gold cape with a gold tabard underneath and Odysseus, his son, wears the same outfit in silver (figure 13). Odysseus's grey feathered cape and shiny silver tabard makes him seem ostentatious and theatrical in addition to matching his father's. Even when Odysseus wears his disguise upon his return from war (figure 14), his silver tabard stay blatant yet he believes he's still "the wily trickster" fooling everyone. This added detail makes him seem vain. Finally, Odysseus's son Telemachus wears a copper outfit. Again, the audience may not choose to dwell on the generations of gold, silver, and bronze men and may not find it amusing, however, Telemachus's bronze garments still parodies him by making him infantile. He wears metallic harem pants and an open, sequined vest, recalling a child's costume or even a trained monkey (figure 15).

> *As though to emphasize his Peter-Pan pseudo-masculinity, Telemachus's most profound exclamation is the emphatic "manners are for girls!"*

When he sets off to find his father, lost at sea, his costume mocks his self-image as hero because he wears an identical silver cape to his father, but approximately four times smaller. Telemachus's tiny cape only hits him at about mid-spine where Odysseus's approached closer to full length. The male royals therefore become parodied on two levels; their shininess and flamboyance makes them seem vain and even ineffective, and their matching outfits keeps them from the noble individuality of a heroic male image.

At last, the suitors function as humorous in moments. As lumpy, bulging, comically large and deliberately cumbersome man-beast hybrids, the suitors do appear as awkward on stage. They sit in exaggerated male postures with legs splayed out, pulling faces (figure 16), and wear

oversized garments that counter-intuitively emphasize the female figure underneath (figure 17). Cloaks drag on the ground, too long for the wearer and sleeves completely obscure the hands, making them look so out of place that it might almost become a comfort to the audience. The suitors remain as unreliable images and their distance from reality "others" them by engaging in both fantasy as well as humor. Their scene of plotting to win Penelope's hand consistently enjoyed the most laughter from the audience during performances. Audience members would later describe it as a "laugh so you don't cry" type of humor and the monster/humor tension in the suitor costumes speaks to this reaction.

Ahistoricism:

> To everyone I spoke to, I asked questions about time. How did you compartmentalize time? Was this play contemporary or ancient or a mix of both? What world did the costumes put you in?

These question felt significant because one of the most striking elements of constructing the Other involves taking them out of time and rendering them a-historical or frozen in obsolete "days gone by." My goal with the costumes was to confuse and blur the linearity of time. The script and staging does this as well; when I spoke to the director, Moler pointed out that ultimately the lighting decisions dictates the arc of time in the show, because Kuzio, the lighting designer had to interpret "daylight," "Hades," "memory/flashback" and "fantasy" (such as the birth of Telemachus, figure 18).

Hallie Christine, the assistant costume designer and head seamstress on Penelope's dress fixated greatly on the play's relationship with time. I explained that the nature of my question dug into the theory of Orientalism and that in the imperial artist's mind, "The East" is a world of "no time." Christine thought it through with me aloud:

> "The First moment and last moment [of the show] offer the perfect pair: they are unfamiliar and unrecognizable…The audience has a hard time taking them both in.[6]"
>
> Christine here refers to the opening scene in which Penelope sits on the stairs alone and begins a series of confessions to the audience (figure 19) and the last scene in which Penelope reverses her posture on the stairs to gaze up at all the maids—now in war paint—with her back to the audience (figure 20)
>
> These bookending scenes are foreign and aggressive for the audience, we agree; "this pre-story mimic theirs post-story. The first moment alienates them whereas the final moment is still alienated but less so…[we, the audience, are] still not with them.[7]"
>
> I interpret her comments as claiming the play, while most of it enjoys a roughly comprehensive narrative arc, situates itself in a disturbingly timeless world. This strange lack of time isolates the viewer and complicates the role of the audience. We then readdressed the discussion of self and other, and I asked how/if time contributed to that discussion:
>
> "I think it's fascinating that by the end Penelope is still the self but being the self becomes unsettling. We feel the implications of the other—we are not a 'self' in the other.[8]"

The thought that Penelope stayed "self" throughout the show gave me pause. I had known from the beginning that one of my goals had been to de-other the maids and to make Penelope an Other to them. Penelope's neoclassical silk dress and its vivid emerald green situated her in an entirely different time period than the maids. The maids felt dirty and ancient everywhere that Penelope felt refined and a version of "modern." The two sets of women foil and Other each other, the formal elements of the costumes alone made that the impulse reaction. I also suspected the maids would not become "self" for the audience; I treated them as "others" as I made their clothing and only sought to add commentary and propose a more productive way to depict "female others."

> *"Make them look like they have* been *fetishized without fetishizing them yourself," I kept telling myself.*

[6] Conversation With Hallie Christine, assistant costume designer and seamstress, Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, NY, March 2015.
[7] Conversation with Hallie Christine.
[8] Conversation with Hallie Christine.

But Christine brought to my attention the significance of Penelope's relationship to the audience. The show ends with Penelope so alone and friendless that it seemed almost she would become "othered" and isolated to us. But as an audience member, Christine pointed out that we join Penelope in her isolation as we too become forced to gaze up at the intimidating barricade of maids at the end of the play. At the conclusion of our discussion, we agreed that Penelope's selfhood reinforces the Other commentary I hoped to provide. The audience has no choice but to look at and try to understand the other.

Christine mentioned as an aside that the "strange and uncomfortable final lines of the show" complicate the perception of time and "indicate that this might be an unfinished retelling.[9]" The lines she refers to come from Penelope as she describes the maids as they appear in the present-day underworld, Hades. After being hanged unjustly by Odysseus, and even in the afterlife, the maids' "still twitching feet don't touch the ground.[10]"

Cloth, Cleaning, and Bodies: Understanding The Maids

The Penelopiad doesn't simply tell a story about women but describes what western thought still thinks of as "a woman's world." Therefore, the most important elements of the costumes had less to do with the female, strictly speaking, and more to do with the network of stereotypical female relationships that form over the course of the play. The costumes engage with themes that extend into the text and staging of the show and help compose the symptomatic meaning of what I will call the "maid archetype," namely, the mistreated and Othered female. The actions and dialogue consider the notion that women have only two tasks: women seduce and women labor. Simplifying and essentializing the female character limits and Others her, so rather than attempt to rewrite her, I thought to follow the examples of

[9] Conversation with Hallie Christine.
[10] Atwood, *The Penelopiad,* 82.

contemporary theory and practice,[11] and readdress the relationships she has already been assigned.

Considering the dual role of the maids as seducers and laborers, the costumes, in their attempt to convey this disturbing duality aligned with several important female relationships in the show. After watching the production, I invited actors, designers, production team members, and audience members to discuss these relationships. In a series of conversations and interviews, the company of this production and I addressed the success of the costume's "deconstructive" goal through the frames of "the female and cloth relationship," "The female cleaning relationship," and 'the female and bodies" relationship.

Cloth:

> Penelope' first promise to her audience states, "I'll spin a yarn of my own.[12]"
> She reports "twisting wool into thread" in the courtyard and "retiring to the women's quarters for the refuge of weaving in peace. [13]
> She devises a scheme, delays the inevitable, and makes all her female relationships in acts that revolve around cloth.

Cloth is traditionally considered the woman's only tool and only resource; clothing serves as her only means of expression and protection, her domestic domain of cleaning and crafting revolves around it, and even her own body has historically functioned as a stand in for fabric or vice versa.

This intimacy between women and cloth in western canon begins in the classical world. Ancient Greek mythology gave cloth to woman as her chief resource. Pallas Athena features heavily as a symbol in this show, not written in or cast as a character but rather consistently mentioned as the most important deity in *The Penelopiad*. Athena, according to mythology was the goddess of weaving, and angrily created the spider from a young female weaver named

[11] For a more detailed analysis of the theoretical framework, please refer to "No Country but My Body," the accompanying essay in which I examine how contemporary artists like Amy Cutler further the discussion on female Other depiction.
[12] Atwood, *The Penelopiad,* 5.
[13] Atwood, *The Penelopiad,* 31.

Arachne as jealous punishment for her prowess at weaving. Athena's legacy serves to show that even the gods left the domain and legislation of cloth as it were in the hands of female goddesses.

Similarly The Fates, three horrifying sisters who control the destinies of mankind do so by weaving tapestries of every individual's life and snipping the threads to kill as they please. This myth suggests the ancient Greek ethos appreciated and feared the potential of female power, and linked it to the meticulous fiber arts mortal women performed in real life. This both acknowledges strength and locks female race into an inescapable "toiling" role, one of two women supposedly possess.

Finally of note, the Roman goddess of virginity and marriage was significantly named "Hymen"[14] and the somewhat exclusive relationship between women and fabric therefore persisted long after the Odyssey ended. People long associated the virginal membrane with fabric and cloth continued to allegorize women in the modern world. The handkerchief became a woman's key social prop. Cloth is at once malleable, soft, and fragile as well as strong and complexly woven. I therefore knew cloth would be a significant part of the costumes. Not just because the costumes would be made of cloth, but the cloth itself had to bear significance.

Cloth offers an escape and affords Penelope agency; she uses the shroud's trick to keep her control for as long as possible and unite with other women. Cloths also act as the chief props for all women:

> Penelope worriedly rips cloth throughout the show
> The maids scrub with cloths and tug at their dresses constantly,
> Melantho pulls down her ripped skirt after being raped and refers to "lifting skirts" as a euphemism for being raped, suggesting cloth offers her only barrier
> The women create the set with long shrouds of fabric (figure 21) and rip it down for the climax of their deaths.

[14] This concept can be found in Paul Hills' article "Titian's Veils". The author describes the multivalent meaning of cloth and the female body in Renaissance painting, but his thesis bears some relevance to a discussion of the cloth/female body relationship at large. Paul Hills, "Titian's Veils," *Art History* vol 29 5 (Wiley Blackwell Publishing: November 2006): 771-795.

In another conversation with the director, I asked how she arrived at the unique set piece of hanging shrouds of white fabric that the maids periodically repositioned. I felt it important to understand all uses of fabric in the show's text and staging before attempting to fully analyze my own decisions about fabric. Moler described her use of fabric as informing the play's "central idea" that what we saw was not Penelope's story but rather "the maids' story." The set fabric sought to alert the audience to the fact that the maids "had more control" than we might assumed. Moler also mentioned one of my central thoughts on the use of fabric: it enjoyed the dual nature as a flexible element the maids could manipulate while also acting as an agent of strength. Moler further insisted that the show be filled with as much fabric as possible, as part of her goal was to recognize it as a female tool and give it some sense of dominance. We concluded with Moler lightly calling her choice to drape the set in fabric a "no brainer" and I must agree with both its ease and its overwhelming significance to the aesthetic, the story, and the themes of the show.

I used cloth in part to homogenize the group; I let the fabric of one skirt appear as a bodice applique on another, used the scraps from various sewing projects as textural details on other garments, and hand-dyed a wide array of costume pieces the same warm brown color, to give the entire cast the glow of one similar, unifying hue. When asked whether the maids seemed to wear a uniform as Ithican palace employees, the responses varied greatly. Moler suggested that the maids had worn a uniform two thousand years ago but that they had time to redesign their outfits several times since their entrance into Hades, where the show takes place.

> *I continually compared the maids to moths, in thin, membranous layers of dusty fabric while Penelope remained trapped in a green chrysalis.*

The cloth choices also created the self/other divide I hoped to achieve. While the maids became united under a family of distressed fabrics, Penelope dons a starkly different emerald green dress, cut in Empire style to make her recall but not fully represent the classical era her story vaguely takes place in. Helen's lapis bias cut dress foils Penelope's regal green because the

former hugs the figure where the latter skims over and ignores the curves and shows more skin through thin straps and a thigh-high slit while Penelope remains nearly all covered. Both the women's rich jewel toned, full-length gowns foiled the rest of the company. Many audience members questioned agency and the benefits for either mode of fabric draping. When asked who had the power, half the interviewed audience members felt that Penelope's rich tone and precise construction gave her authority and class, demanded the viewer's attention and therefore rendered her the in control character, while others claimed that Penelope was confined by the delicacy of her diaphanous material whereas the maids, in durable, already distressed clothing maintained the freedom of a full range of motion.

Noah Kernis '14 expressed concern that every time Penelope sat or moved, her dress was likely to rip, whereas the maids were in no danger of tears. This question of agency vs. confinement through fabric also begged the "self/other" question. I asked everyone I spoke to whether the maids became characters we identified with, or whether we still ultimately saw the piece as Penelope's story and reluctantly related to the "heroine." My goal had been to keep the maids as Other for that was how I interpreted them reading the script, but to complicate their image enough so that they couldn't be a dismissed or essentialized "other group."

To my relief, most people interpreted the separation the way I had intended. Moler too confessed that her goal was that despite creating the "maids' story" the audience should ultimately relate to Penelope and, as in Brecht's theatrical theory, feel the same isolation by the maids that Penelope feels. This idea comes across particularly in the final staged moment where Penelope stands at eye level with the audience facing the maids who gaze down at her from the mezzanine. I asked Moler if she was inspired by the idea of viewer placement in fine art and she excitedly confirmed her desire to create a tableau that made the audience see through Penelope's eyes. I would even elaborate on the success of this staging by comparing the image to Gerome's *The Snake Charmer*. The viewer clearly faces a scene not as the audience to the show being performed, but as an audience to the whole procession, performance and troop of "others"

alike. Moler similarly blocked an arc of visually homogenous women against the very back and separated the viewer from them with a central figure whose back faces the audience. In fact the green glow of Penelope's dress echoes the bright turquoise of *The Snake Charmer's* setting, further leaving both audience's with the impression that they've stumbled into an exotic and separate world.

Cleaning:

> "Dirt was our specialty, dirt was our business, dirt was our concern, dirt was our fault,[15]" the maids explain to the audience.

As the three relationships in this discussion include women/cloth and women/bodies, women/cleaning acts as a kind of intermediate point between the two. Cleaning functions both as the tactile work of women "laboring" as well as carries more carnal and salacious implications. As Atwood certainly intended, the maids' refrain "we were the dirty girls[16]" suggests both literal and self-conduct related filth.

In practice, dirt, mess, and "unclean elements" became a central visual element in the costumes. The garments all got purposefully distressed, shredded with cheese graters, frayed with seam rippers, dip dyed, scrunched and wrinkled, caked with powder designed to resemble charcoal or ash, or rubbed with a wax-based product in colors designed to look like specific stains. Additionally, hair and makeup designer Alyssa Hagerbrandt '16 and I consulted on how to address grubbiness on the face and arms. Hagerbrandt teased and tangled most hair, and added dirt power to their hand and knees every time they exited the stage.

While the maids grew increasingly dirty in each scene, the final climax in which the maids "demand retribution" and vow to haunt Penelope and Odysseus forever, shows the cast smear black paint and grime on their faces. Similarly, in shooting the poster image, I used black acrylic paint and wiped it quickly across actress Lily Donahue '15's face, then sprayed her with

[15] Atwood, *The Penelopiad,* 10.
[16] Atwood, *The Penelopiad,* 10.

water so the paint would drip. This harsh image of sopping black paint has multiple implications. The repeated motif from the poster to the an unrelated scene in the show could reference the "war paint" idea, but I would add the further interpretation that the pitch-like substance represents the moment in which the women take control of the filth on their bodies. The darkness, opaqueness, and deliberate gestures of the marks contrasts the subtle, submissive dirt that previously coated the maids' hands and faces. The audience can infer, then, that these striking dark marks reverse the role of dirt; the maids suddenly achieve agency through dirtiness.

I asked Moler about the song "Dreamboats" which addresses beauty and cleanness and the fantasies of the maids. Moler and I were both struck by how the maids' ultimate wish is to be clean, rather than free. Clearly cleanness allegorizes not just their bodies but their treatment too. Tragically the song still begs for a male rescuer to sleep with and love, and the maids all take up rags to clean themselves. I asked Moler why the maids physically cleaned with prop rags (notably cloth, not sponges) rather than pantomime and she explained how the cleaning was "not a poetic moment" and that the audience "needed to see them actually clean."

I was struck by this idea and the fact that not even in a play that gives voices to the silent can we idealize the fact that these women constantly found themselves on their hands and knees scrubbing and tidying filth, and likely only with water. Penelope in fact often gets compared to water throughout the show. Her mother, as a Naiad, has made her daughter "half water" further distancing her from the maids.

Bodies:

During my conversation with the cast, I shared a set of quotes I thought bore significance to the tactileness of assessing their own bodies in costumes. I chose these quotes partly based on the connection they maintained to my original research and the cautionary tales of the Othering

Mata Hari and Josephine Baker manufactured; I hoped it would help to see where their archetype came from, in part.

> "Dance for me, my cell mates said…/…I realized/again, I had no country/the only country I ever had was my body"
> --From Judith Burke's Poem "Mata Hari in Saint Lazare Prison 1917" that imagines Hari's time in jail awaiting execution

> ""Who knows; perhaps your colorful feathers could save us from our time"
> "The Black Venus," "savage rejuvenation," and "island princess" ideas
> --From various reviews describing the appeal of Josephine Baker

> ""I love the idea of a fictional utopia of women who are strong and self-reliant"
> "I think it comes from my fascination with anything that is meticulously crafted – things that are created by individuals with specifically honed skills…I am especially drawn to methodical work that requires a lot of concentration…[T]he rhythm and repetition…lends itself to introspection"
> --Amy Cutler discussing her images of women performing "women's work"

A memorable moment occurred when one actress asked about neoclassical style and how that found its way into Penelope's costume. I explained that female dress often echoes the general design style of the time: during the gilded, opulent eighteenth century, female bodies became covered in "sensual" surface design and panier skirts/ conical stays matched the horizontality and flatness of interior decorating, Victorian curvatures in decorative arts appeared too in crinolines, bustles, and hourglass shaped corsets, the streamlined simple bold shape of flapper styles mimicked art deco, and so forth. For the context of the show, I mentioned that neoclassical high waist gowns attempted to make the woman look columnar like the architecture around her. Indigence erupted from the cast and several women exclaimed how distressing to think women have literally been "objectified" through the history of Western dress.

To the cast, I recalled a term paper I had written about corsetry in the Edwardian era and how disturbing a contrast it is that Great Masculine Renunciation of ca. 1800 reinvented the male silhouette to henceforth mimic the classical nude body whereas women continued to aspire towards resembling animals and objects. I looked back at my initial inspiration images for the

Penelopiad and found a significant design by Paul Poiret (figure 22), already a designer known for his comfort in constructing a "chic new" "female other." The fountain woman in Poiret's design suddenly felt far more problematic than I had initially found it. I selected the image for inspiration at the very beginning of the design process because it occurred to me one artistic choice that might happen would be to use actresses momentarily as set pieces. It then instantly occurred to me how wildly out of place and disturbing this function would be, and I continued teasing out the idea of the function of bodies.

While some silhouettes could be marked as classical with their Empire waists and wet-drapery like flow, others were directly inspired by other forms of ancient dress and therefore took on a more form fitting, fictionalized appearance (image). One audience member commented that the form fitting pieces still functioned within the world because they echoed a nude silhouette.

Bodies change dramatically when playing men: body language becomes legs spread apart, but also silhouettes change. All suitors have the "female" parts of themselves covered, either their hands (the tools of women's work and crafts as well as cleaning) are concealed or else hats on their heads (hair as another female symbol). Thy wrap their hands in their cloaks and don't use hand gestures.

Anti-Concluding Thoughts:

A true conclusion remains impossible, because this project roused more questions than it answered. I must, however, offer a final thread that connects these concepts of the female Other to the results of this experience. These thoughts address what happened and what happens next.

Melantho of the Pretty Cheeks wears the simplest dress and becomes the only character explicitly raped in the text. She is not raped because she looks sexual; a rape victim can look like anything.

I applied this thinking to the question of the female Other in general in creating these costumes. I tried to take fetishized, sexualized, and Othered women and give them new clothes,

contrasting Baker's and Hari's spectacle of jewels and bananas, to give them back their true identities. Somewhere in this process I lost the feeling that the female Other must disappear. That I must make these costumes turn these women into Self.

I didn't successfully remove the female Other from this production, but I hope that I redressed her. She will always exist but we as artists and scholars can change what she looks like. And she can look like anything.

These ideas about the female Other rather than disappearing, telling a fresh story, emerged beatufully in my many conversations with women involved in this project. Tremendous insight came from one of my one-on-one sessions with an actress and in keeping with the spirit of collaboration and opening the dialogue for perspectives from the "inside," our interview makes the most fitting finale to my analysis of this experience:

A Conversation with an Actress: Becca Zipursky playing Klytie and Antinous (the main suitor) discusses Body Functions:

AG: Did you see the maid costumes as providing or withholding agency? Did you feel strong or weak in it, or did it shift?

BZ: [On The Maid Costume]: I see myself as wearing rags. It had some agency but not much. Wearing the suitor costume is what ultimately gave her agency, she said. "I found it so satisfying to drape myself in an ugly demonic garment"

My arms and hands were in gloves; that meant I had less dexterity—those gloves and gauntlets gave me a slimy feel. I felt oily or greasy when I slid them on.

Maids needed delicate and free use of fingers in order to engage in women's work.
In playing a suitor, Becca appreciated "creating a silhouette" that she doesn't "naturally own." In being a suitor, she felt larger: body, hands, and especially shoulders.

I was larger and yet still less functional

AG: Interesting the girth of the suitors: for them it was all about the shoulders whereas for women, we think about femininity being all about the hips. It's interesting how we create a foil even in just our centers of gravity.

BZ: We spent a whole day learning to walk and talk like men. We had to practice strutting and taking up space. We did an exercise where we'd point to every object in a room and say, with confidence, "that's mine, that's mine, that's mine".

AG: I love that huge difference

BZ: One of the funniest moments to me, although I don't know why no one ever laughed, is that scene when Penelope lists all our real names as maids, but the suitor maids are still in the suitor costumes. And when I hear her say Klyte, my maid's name, I sit up straight and put my legs together and all of a sudden I'm aware of how big this suitor costume is on my and I'm literally drowning in fabric!

AG: What was your big moment, that big rape scene like? I have to ask, what did it feel like to attack another actress and then immediately shed that violent costume and re-enter to comfort her as a maid?

BZ: As an actor it was therapeutic to get to "shed" the costume that had just caused pain. We talked about what kind of maids we all were in Ithica—what our jobs were. And I would have been a Milkmaid, and the mom of the group.

It was jarring physically to work with Rachel –the size difference between us was overwhelming.

I came to the habit of hugging her after our fight choreo [the nightly running the rape scene; necessary to practice physical altercation scenes every night to ensure actor safety].

AG: Were you comfortable in your costume? When you weren't a suitor, did you think about how Klytie is also a victim of assault like Melantho?

BZ: Yes I felt comfortable in the costume—I thought it was funny the lengths we had to go to cover me on top.

AG: I confess, I was more sensitive to your costume than some of the others because you and I have similar body types. I was just naturally sympathetic to the physics of what was possible. But it was funny because I didn't realize Rachel (Melantho of the Pretty Cheeks) might not fit into the tiny dress I put together for her. I actually had to expand it because she's got curves, but because of who she played, it never occurred to me.

BZ: Yes, that surprised us all [laughter]. And yes I was (and always have been) aware of my bust.

Another thing we talked about is how we would have been targeted based on body type.

Becca knew she was a target for specific men. Knew all the maids would be targets for specific men like they were in a brothel and they could pick the traits that they liked the most.

BZ: I felt at risk.

AG: Did you see yourself as in a uniform?

BZ: No, I felt like I was wearing something I picked up that I thought was pretty. Individual.

AG: Was Klytie an individual character to you?

BZ: yes absolutely.

AG: What about the relationship with Penelope?

BZ: It's interesting that the Maids do NOT choose to haunt the suitors, they haunt Penelope.

AG: If we think of “the Maids” with a capital M as a “type” who, if anyone, would you say are The Maids today? Who were they in other eras?

BZ: The silent members of society

Becca mentions foot binding in China and expresses her concern that “The Maids” are a much bigger group of people than we realize.

We conclude by discussing the show’s true responsibility:

All of history has maids and our task now is to retell history. If history is told by the victor then its our time now to tell the story from the perspective of the people who didn’t win. Let the loser speak. Let the Other tell history.

Let the Other tell history.

Figure 1: Barber, Jamie, set design and Jarred Green, photographer. Still of the set from Skidmore's *The Penelopiad*. February-March 2015.

Figure 2: Kuzio James, lighting designer, and Jarred Green, photographer. Still of lighting from Skidmore's *The Penelopiad,* February-March 2015.

Figure 3: Green, Alli, costume designer and Jared Klein, photographer. Still of company from Skidmore's *The Penelopiad,* February-March 2015.

Figure 4: Green, Alli, costume designer and Jared Klein, photographer. Still of company from Skidmore's *The Penelopiad,* February-March 2015.

Figure 5: Green, Alli, costume designer and Julian Klein, photographer. Still of company from Skidmore's *The Penelopiad,* February-March 2015.

Figure 6: Green, Alli, costume designer and Jared Klein, photographer. Still of company from Skidmore's *The Penelopiad,* February-March 2015.

Figure 7: Green, Alli, costume designer and Jared Klein, photographer. Still of company from Skidmore's *The Penelopiad,* February-March 2015.

Figure 8: Green, Alli, costume designer and Jared Klein, photographer. Still of actress from Skidmore's *The Penelopiad,* February-March 2015.

Figure 9: Green, Alli, costume designer and Jared Klein, photographer. Still of actress from Skidmore's *The Penelopiad,* February-March 2015.

Figure 10: Green, Alli, costume designer and Jared Klein, photographer. Still of company from Skidmore's *The Penelopiad,* February-March 2015.

Figure 11: 10. Cave, Nick, *SoundSuit,* 2008, mixed media.

Figure 12: Green, Alli, costume designer and Jared Klein, photographer. Still of company from Skidmore's *The Penelopiad,* February-March 2015.

Figure 13: Green, Alli, costume designer and Jarred Green, photographer. Still of company from Skidmore's *The Penelopiad,* February-March 2015.

Figure 14: Green, Alli, costume designer and Jared Klein, photographer. Still of company from Skidmore's *The Penelopiad,* February-March 2015.

Figure 15: Green, Alli, costume designer and Jared Klein, photographer. Still of company from Skidmore's *The Penelopiad,* February-March 2015.

Figure 16: Green, Alli, costume designer and Jared Klein, photographer. Still of company from Skidmore's *The Penelopiad,* February-March 2015.

Figure 17: Green, Alli, costume designer and Jared Klein, photographer. Still of company from Skidmore's *The Penelopiad,* February-March 2015.

Figure 18: Kuzio, James, lighting designer and Jarred Green, photographer. Still of company from Skidmore's *The Penelopiad,* February-March 2015.

Figure 19: Green, Alli, costume designer and Jared Klein, photographer. Still of actress from Skidmore's *The Penelopiad,* February-March 2015.

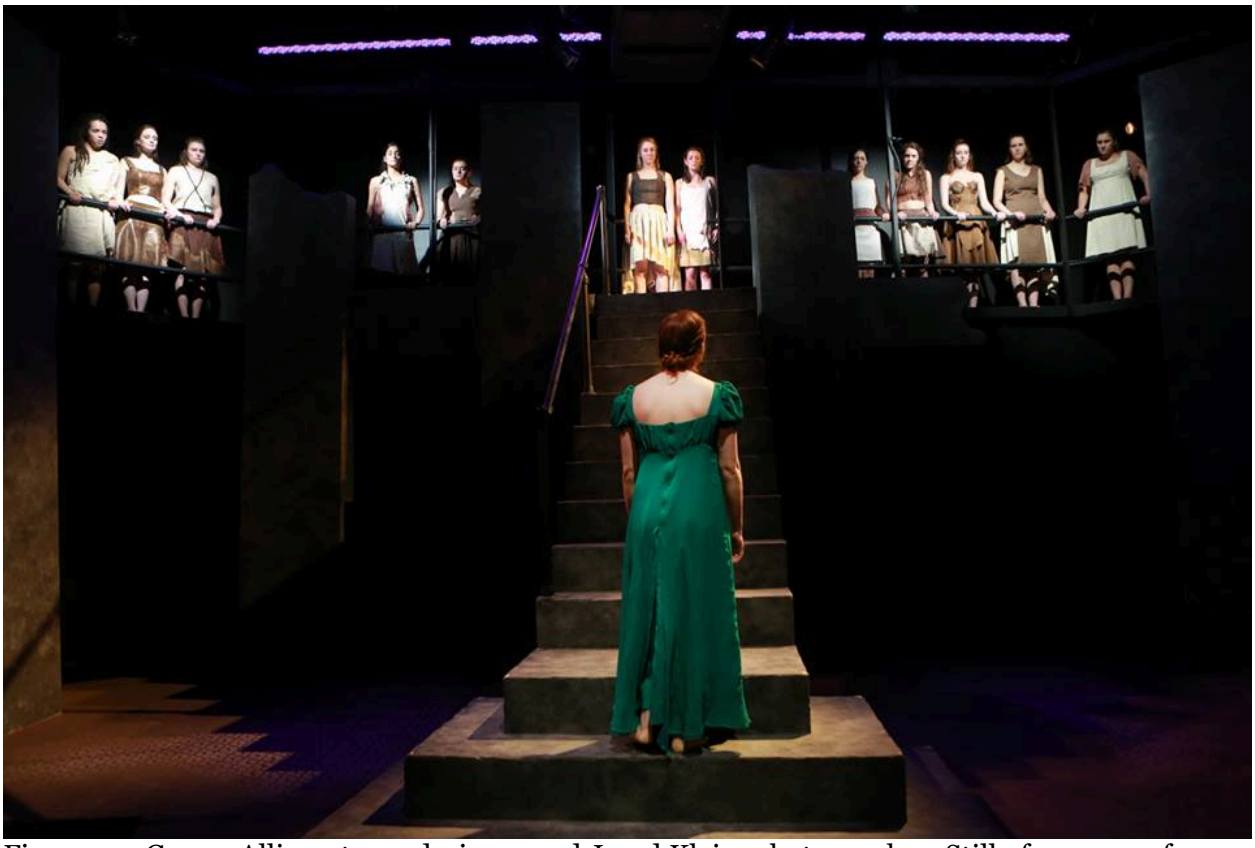

Figure 20: Green, Alli, costume designer and Jared Klein, photographer. Still of company from Skidmore's *The Penelopiad,* February-March 2015.

Figure 21: Green, Alli, costume designer and Jared Klein, photographer. Still of company from Skidmore's *The Penelopiad,* February-March 2015.

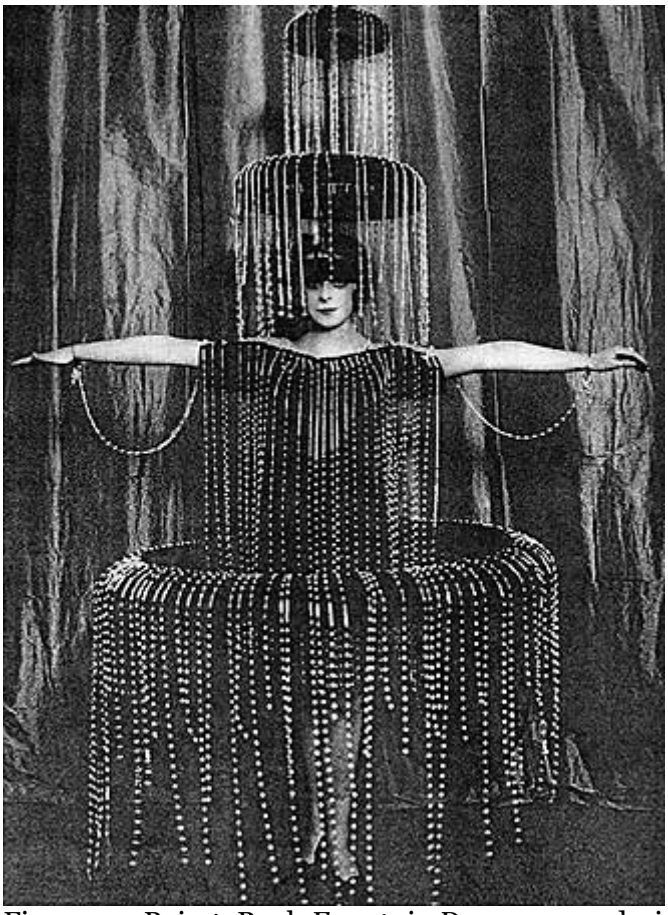

Figure 22: Poiret, Paul. *Fountain Dress*. 1920s design. Photograph.

"'No Country but my Body:'[1] Addressing and Dressing the Other Female through Mata Hari, Josephine Baker, and the Work of Amy Cutler"

Alli Green

[1] Judith Burke, "Mata Hari in Saint-Lazare Prison, 1917,",*The Massachusetts Review* 31, No. 4 (Winter, 1990): 511-512.

"The only country I ever had was my body."

So laments Judith Burke's 1990 poem, "oMata Hari in Saint-Lazare Prison, 1917.[2]" Besides simply reinterpreting the Oriental dancer/courtesan's infamous legacy as a spy for Germany during World War I, Burke's poem springboards a necessary conversation about the nature of "the female 'other[3]'" as constructed by the Western world. Burke's words establish a connection between female bodies and countries, both of which have long shared the status of "territories" and conquerable, tradable commodities. National identity remains masculine but colonialism and imperialism have long been allegorized by the successful "take over" of a female. From personifying continents and lands as women (Europa, for instance) to the notion of colonial conquest as "penetration," the relationship between female bodies and world conquest, largely led by Western empires, remains an established paradigm in both socio-political and visual culture. With the following examples, I endeavor to trace an origin of the female Other, address the impact of perpetuating the "exotic erotic female" image, propose the evolution of this archetype, and assess the task that contemporary artists who engage with these issues undertake. In attempting to understand and ultimately reconcile the fraught image of "exotic female otherness" the first question to address concerns how colonialism and the world of Western modernity and empire, only recently complicated by post-colonial and post-modernist theory, constructed the female Other.

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[2] Burke, "Mata Hari."

[3] Alterity, as a still relatively new field study, means that the language for describing "self" and Other remains a complex challenge; scholars still continue to search for the proper way to write about these new terms. For the sake of visual clarity, this paper will henceforth refer to the Other as simply the Other, titling the idea to make clear its significance.

A side—or perhaps central—effect of Western imperialism appeared as the captivating image of the female Other an exotic, erotic figure typically shown imprisoned in the gilded cages of fictionalized harems, lounging seductively among sparkling trinkets and feathers, or toiling in rags as "pretty peasants"[4] and gypsies. At her essence, the female Other of this study is a sensual, submissive victim made "outsider" by her ambiguous origins as "foreign" and/or by her class. This study begins in Paris during the last chapter of (traditionally conceived) Western imperialism and then reemerges in the contemporary art world. The stage of Paris from the late nineteenth through the early twentieth centuries carries a clear alignment with Western imperialism and the consequentially unsavory images of female Others. Mata Hari's and Josephine Baker's bodies encompass the flawed politics of representing the female Other in largely-colonial Europe; the phenomenon douses them with all the feathers jewels, and "non-western" spectacle necessary to distance and Other them from their audiences. The connection to this topic in Amy Cutler's work seems less obvious. When considering this study's central idea of female Other bodies and dress as a problematic result in part of Western, patriarchal and colonial ideologies, the leap to the contemporary art world must take place carefully. Amy Cutler engages in somewhat different subject matter and, as an illustrator, works with entirely different materials almost one hundred years later than Mata Hari and Josephine Baker debuted on stage;

[4] The idea of the "pretty peasant" archetype comes from Griselda Pollock. Her writing has provided useful framework for considering the relationship between sexualized peasants and the female Other however her subject matter often extends beyond the scope of this investigation.
Griselda Pollock, "Van Gogh and the Poor Slaves: Images of Rural Labor as Modern Art," *Art History,* vol 11, 3, (September 1988): 408-432.

she joins the study, however for three key reasons that make her contribute depth to the topic.

Firstly, Cutler engages with these themes in the contemporary world, highlighting the pervasive relevance of the topic. Her illustrations, which relay optimism, carry the postmodern condition of pushing boundaries and creating unique imagery; optimism in art remains rarer than pessimism. Her "utopian" depictions, I argue, are of the sort contemporary artists *should* engage with. I propose optimism might be the path to freeing the female Other. Many artists, like, supposedly similar artist Kara Walker, criticize the alterity/female body issue, which is necessary, but Cutler becomes exemplary because she proposes a "solution" or "evolution" to the issues. Cutler's contemporaries, like Walker and performance artist and writer Coco Fusco exhibit explicitly the nature of the problem: ethnicity and class-related Other-ing, and employ images of femininity but Cutler engages with the problem in a different way, proposing optimism as counter to their criticism. Additionally representing the freshness of contemporary art, Cutler's works address female identity more wholly. While not necessarily "feminist," this whole study surrounds attempting to analyze the connection between alterity practices and the female body. Cutler focuses entirely on the female and her traditional attributes, and with no men, she emphasizes that point. In the work (while still significant and exemplary) of Coco Fusco and Kara Walker, men remain present and Othering practices remain primary whereas Cutler's "outsider" women maintain their "femaleness" as the primary consideration.

Secondly, and similar to showing the topic's breadth through time, Cutler's work adds diversity to the study, further expressing that the topic's reach extends farther than

the obvious. For one, the change in medium adds diversity to the study. Here Coco Fusco's work, as it still deals with the clothed female Other in a strange and harmful setting (a cage[5]) might seem the right choice to proceed with, as it still concerns physically built costumes. But Cutler's media, guache, watercolor, print ink and paper, connect her work compositionally to the world of colonial Western appropriation of ideas (some of her prints appear on "Japan paper") yet prove that this appropriation can be used to a progressive effect. Cutler also introduces a new type of female Other that broadens the discussion and illuminates more subtle features of the issue, namely, the mpoverished, penniless female Other. Not just the exotic sensual female Other but now the "class female Other" joins the discussion. When thinking of female Otherness, a necessary trait all visual tropes seem to share is a sense of the downtrodden, the victimization, the submission. Non Western female Others are often also societal others such as dancers and prostitutes. Cutler's visual discussion of peasant female Otherness connects female Othering with class and highlights the parallel issue that runs beside the "exotic," namely, the "primitive."

Thirdly, and finally, Cutler focuses on the female/dress and female/cloth relationship. Because of the nature of female Other dress, cloth serves an essential vertebrae of this study. Analysis of the female garments, postures, gestures, and bodily attributes on Cutler's characters directly foils the contrasting costumes of women like Mata Hari and Josephine Baker. Her attention to fabric and shape and merging dress

[5] Describing Fusco's work more fully extends beyond the scope of this investigation, however, an exemplary primary account of one of her female-Other-featuring pieces can be found in its accompanying writing piece, . "The Other History of Intercultural Performance" published for *The Drama Review* 1994.

with setting keeps the undercurrent of study focused on dress and bodies, and the tools used to connect them, such as cloth or its loud absence. She uses cloth as attributes for her illustrated women and cloth affords her women agency. This decision uses the same tool in the opposite way as the conventions of cloth we see in Mata Hari's and Josephine Baker's dress. The following Baker/Hari studies address a lack of cloth. Exposure, nudity and crude means of body covering remove agency from these female Other examples. Cutler's work returns cloth to women and "re-dresses" them, literally, covering their bodies and letting cloth feature as their main source of control.

By first examining the cult of the female Other image through the tragedies of Mata Hari (1876-1917), Josephine Baker (1906-1975), and their unique appearances, I aim to establish the problems and persistence of this visual archetype. By then incorporating the contemporary art world, focusing on the work of artist Amy Cutler (1974-), I propose that new theories and practices have dramatically revised of this obsolete portrait.

Part I: The World(s) of Mata Hari and Josephine Baker

While alterity today has a loud art historical voice, certain case studies of Othering, thanks to their spectacle and allure, have remained outside the discourse, bleached out by their own spotlight. A prime example of relatively-undiscussed Othering in material culture appears on the Parisian stage from its Belle Epoque in the 1890s through the 1920s Jazz Age. During these movements, the Western world crowned Paris as the hub of modern culture while, simultaneously, France continued its fraught

relationship with foreign or Other nations and colonies. The potent combination of the reverence for Parisian culture and Paris's own fascination with the so-called exotic meant that images of the Other permeated deeply into all Parisian aesthetics. But as the Western world still largely loves Paris, certain details of its alterist past have stayed largely ignored. Orientalism, primitivism, and exoticism all shaped Parisian culture around the turn of the twentieth century and this study addresses the representation of the most fraught of all Other categories: the female. Between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Parisian stage lit up with jewels, feathers, veils, and even fruit, to construct immortalized images of "primitive" and "exotic" female bodies. What can contemporary audiences make of the set of images of artists like Josephine Baker, darling of the jazz age, and Mata Hari, mysterious courtesan of the Belle Epoque, both of whom adopted Other dress in their performance costumes? In the cases of these two performers, we see the unique phenomenon of women playing active roles in the politics of representation. Baker and Hari, both of whom maintained control of their costume designs, used Other dress to create their own self determined images and forge their own innitially successful careers. In practice, these women used Other dress in a similar way to their male Orientalist predecessors, but with a supposed "female agency" twist. Baker and Hari embraced the Other aesthetic and appropriated "exotic" imagery themselves, attaining short-lived great success through the erotic images they had a hand in creating. Their costumes, from Baker's iconic banana tutu to Hari's ambiguously "Hindu" metal breastplates exemplify a uniquely-female use of Other image manufacturing. Baker and Hari appropriated African and Eastern (respectively) fantasies of dress to fuel their own personal agendas, and while they seemingly attained agency through their construction of exotic self-image, they ultimately fed the typical

and unproductive mode of exotic female representation. Their attempt to subvert the Western imperialist hierarchy by using exotic dress to control their own images ultimately did not find success but instead contributed to their downfalls.

To fully understand the topic at hand, it is important to acknowledge the cultural and political trends shaping Paris during this time. Since Western culture has a long legacy of struggling to "deal with" the Other in art, performance, popular culture, and socio-political policies, it is equally important to identify the West's idea of "self." The disposition of the "self,[6]" namely the Western educated, straight, white male, centers on full domination over all Other groups, particularly ethnic Others, women, poor people, and most especially/most problematically, the exotic, ethnically other, often poor woman. The Self"s and the Western audience's fixation on the exotic, submissive, receptive Other female body directs the focus of this study. But what characterized the Parisian fixation on the Other during the eras in question? The late nineteenth century Paris aesthetic strived for so-called "modernity," emphasized progress, and rejected old Salon styles of neoclassical naturalism. Most prolific of these rebellious modernity ambitions included new art movements like colorful Impressionist and Post-Impressionist paintings, and Cubism's move towards abstraction.[7] Artists of these movements, like the city that celebrated their work, felt drawn to "distant lands" and excited about the prospect of capturing the "exotic" and the "other." Matisse's works found content and aesthetic inspiration from East Asia and Morocco[8] as detailed in his

[6] The term "self" will now also be henceforth called Self, for clarity's sake.
[7] Saleema Waraich, "Aims and Mechanics; The East/West Problematique," Lecture, Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs New York, September 9th, 2014.
[8] Saleema Waraich, "Orientalism and Art," Lecture, Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs New York, September 30th, 2014

romantic depictions of veiled women and lounging idle "Arabs" (figure 1). Matisse additionally drew on Japanese principles of design including a subdued, natural color scheme and a construction of two dimensionality.[9] Gauguin meanwhile made pilgrimages to Tahiti and captured—in all senses of the word—the native women in his paintings. Gauguin's *Manao Tupapau* (figure 2) in particular extends beyond Matisse's celebration and essentialization of a new color palette, new compositional interpretations, and "new" images of women, and goes so far as to establish a narrative of domination. While western artists apparently celebrated Other art forms, they still felt superiority and in fact strived to articulate this superiority through motifs of control.[10] The viewer of Gauguin's *Manao Tupapau* acts as voyeur, gazing unapologetically at a contained "brown woman" overseen by a cloaked spectator, clearly illustrating submission.[11] Finally, Picasso became inspired by the new Western notion of Primitivism. His *Demoiselles D'Avignon* (figure 3) pulls from African tribal mask and the wide use of emotive abstraction in African art[12] to liken his prostitute images to the lower status of primitive African imagery. This rejection of the French salon style of high art played a huge role in founding the new Parisian aesthetic during the Belle Epoque. The impulse to infuse France and Paris with a new artistic "esprit" inspired artists and thinkers to pull from Other cultures to generate more emotive, erratic creative output.

[9] Waraich, "Orientalism and Art."
[10] Waraich, "Orientalism and Art."
[11] Waraich, "Orientalism and Art."
[12] Lisa Aronson, "African Art, Primitivism and the Colonial Vision," Lecture, Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs New York, January 22nd, 2014.

Additionally, the Parisian stage became alight with new modes of performance. The Moulin Rouge in all its tactile cancan skirts and rhinestones epitomizes the allure of spectacle and a resurfacing of "sensual surfaces" and immediately reconnects the West to a fantastical image of the East. The Moulin Rouge, known as a brothel and a haunt for post-impressionist "rebellious" artists like Toulouse Lautrec, further combined notions of the new celebrated Parisian aesthetic with a fixation and fetish on Other cultures. The peculiar elephant statue, still an icon of Montmartre's landscape, immediately speaks to the marriage between the iconic Parisian image and the influence and celebration of "distant lands As will be discussed below, the Moulin Rouge and other Parisian stages engaged in enormous exotic "spectacular" spectacle, pulling bangles, beads, and glinting materials from all number of imagined and fantasized Other sources like the assumed brothels of India.

As a final piece of context for this examination of Baker and Hari's costumes, France's political agenda also merits consideration. Well into the first quarter of the twentieth century, France continued to have colonial influence over Algeria, Morocco, Vietnam, among many others, and maintained its imperialist agendas.[13] Orientalism, exoticism, and primitivism came as not just ideologies but as a new, iconic Parisian aesthetic. The themes of domination, conquest and the specific identity of the exotic female body play significant roles in the discussion of Baker and Hari, so it becomes essential to understand precisely how this image was constructed and accepted in Paris. False interpretations of the Harem image perpetuated dangerously misconstrued ideas about the Near Eastern female image throughout the nineteenth century, constructed by

[13] Waraich, Saleema, "Cultures of "Discovery and Colonialism," Lecture, Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, New York, September 23rd, 2014.

artists touring (and simply imagining[14]) the Middle East, regions of Africa, and East Asia. Through the West's long tradition of depicting veiled, hidden, and confined Harem women through lattice work windows and behind bars as sexually enticing bodies, this Western aesthetic constructed its own version of the exotic female body shaped by the Western male desire to gaze, dominate and control both women and their nation's own distant colonies. Patriarchy and nationalism therefore together construct the motif of the "exotic female body" as a celebratory symbol of all the ways in which the "self" (as identified above) could control all forms of "the other." While Baker and Hari attempt and at a glance seem to reverse this agenda, they ultimately adhere to it and fail to carve out a new path for the depiction or by extension treatment of the exotic female body. The reversal of this female Other narrative will reemerge more optimistically later on, in the discussion of Amy Cutler's work.

The Images and Agendas: "The Black Venus"

The study of Baker's and Hari's costumes first locates how these women looked and how these looks represented their owners' agendas. The study secondly concerns their ultimate downfalls and failure to achieve the agency their costume suggest they had. To begin, this analysis addresses Josephine Baker, her career, her supposed success and ultimate downfall. The St. Louis-born performer was discovered on the American stage in a chorus line in her late teens, and then taken to Paris to perform on stage in the "La Revue Negre."[15] Paris's Jazz age movement already craved African-American and

[14] Matisse in Morocco
[15] Jones, *Paris,* 390.

Black performers. The reason can only be speculated, but perhaps Paris embraced an early "Black is Beautiful" movement in part because of its primitivist ideas but also because it felt unconcerned with the racial tension churning in America. A black WWII private claimed that in Paris, he felt an "air of liberty, equality, and fraternity…which does not blow in the black man's face in liberty-loving, democratic America"[16] Not accidentally, Baker and other black American performers such as beloved jazz musician Man Rey loved Paris because, as Baker claimed, "we coloured people could live [here] happily, there was no colour bar or racial prejudice.[17]" Baker and others got to "escape" America in Paris. The city received Baker with excitement and the dancer quickly became, in Baker's own words, "the darling of Paris"[18] and enjoyed celebratory monikers like Picasso's nickname for her, "The Modern Nefertiti."[19] She captivated audiences with a unique personality and self-conduct. Described as "gangly, and awkward" with her "quirky singing" [20] as well as charming with her capricious body movements, crossed

[16] Jones, *Paris,* 390.
[17] Gemma Alexander, ed. *The Mammoth Book of Heroic & Outrageous Women (*New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 1999*)* 480.
[18]Alexander, *Heroic and Outrageous Women,* 480.
[19] Alexander *Heroic and Outrageous Women,* 479.
[17] Colin Jones, *Paris: Biography of a City (*London: Penguin, 2006), 390.
[18] Constance L Campbell, "Inventing Josephine: The Influence of the Designers of the Paris Music Halls on the Stage Persona of Josephine Baker," *TD&T: Theater Design & Technology* 35, no 1 (1999).
[19] Carole Sweeney, *From Fetish to Subject: Race, Modernism, and Primitivism, 1919-1935* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger Publishers, 2004) 42.

eyes and playful facial expressions[21] used to amuse her audiences and admirers, Paris celebrated Baker as an eccentric wonder and her costumes exhibited this fascination.

Baker's costumes varied enormously over the decades of her performance career, but she never escaped "the jungle." According to "From Fetish to Subject," Baker's "entire stage career would be based on a series of racial stereotypes."[22] The "whiff of jungle air" that one observer describes as an antidote "to the tired showcase of Western Civilization"[23] would never fully leave Baker's performances. A *New Yorker* review of her debut on the Paris stage details how a man carried her out on stage and stood her up, making her "an unforgettable female ebony statue."[24] This characterization immediately recalls images of African idols and small religious relics often called "fetish" or "fetish objects" by Western explorers and collectors of African artifacts.[25] To reinforce the essential African image, Baker, in this first performance, wore nothing except a large pink flamingo feather. Subsequent performances during her first few years in Paris always had Baker shrouded not in cloth of any kind but instead, an array of "natural materials" including dry grass skirts, flowers, feathers, beads, hard enamels like coconut shells, and of course, the (in)famous banana "non dress"[26] (figure 4). The choice of materials on Baker's body speak to several facets of her multivalent stage identity as a

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[23] Jones, *Paris,* 391.
[24] Sweeney, *From Fetish to Subject,* 42.
[25] Aronson, "African Art, Primitivism and the Colonial Vision."

[23] Jones, *Paris,* 390.

primitive sexual creature. To begin, these materials have their own personalities and agencies that cloth often lacks in costumes, stitched into place and under control of the performer. Grass, reeds, beads, and feathers, however, enjoy their own movement; they shake, quiver, and perform independently from performer's movements. They also introduce their unique sounds and visual sensations like the rustle of dried grass, the trembling of individual fibers of feather, and the glint of beads, sequins and rhinestones. These highly tactile and active materials serve to sexualize Baker by making "touch" the primary sense associated with her dances. They also skimmed off the first layer of her agency, for even with her charismatic presence, Baker did not outshine the dominating presence of her wild materials. Photos of Baker in costume show the dancer peering out through the layers of her feathers (figure 5) and reeds, and even the banana skirt with its dangling activity calls more attention than her face. These materials further rendered Baker not only sexual, but sexually exotic and sexually primitive. The fact that she wore nearly no true cloth during the first stage of her career suggests her lack of civilization. The narrative emerges that to cover herself at all, the resources at her disposal are only pieces of African vegetation. Like Eve, who as the "first" woman could only cover herself in fig leaves, so too does the dancer appear "trapped" in the romantic primitive past with no means of real clothing.

Similarly, Baker's near nudity in most of her performance attire makes her a sexual being and a primitive one. One notable photograph shows Baker topless, her bottom half covered by a lustrous sheath of fabric and with a perhaps ebony elephant statue perched on her knee (figure 6). She gazes at the small elephant with wide, fixated eyes, presses a finger playfully on its back, puffs out her cheeks and presses the elephant's trunk to her own nose. Many characteristics of this interaction perpetuate

Baker's identity as the "ebony statue." Her pose makes her a primitive, sexual, and implicitly conquered. First, Baker's body language and holding of the object mirrors the elephant; her puffed out cheeks and nose-to-"nose" touching suggests she is imitating the elephant. Her body too echoes the elephant's appearance as her slick crop of black hair almost perfectly mimics the elephant's polished body and the round dark contours of her bare breasts also nod to the round dark curve of the elephant's body. Her imitation and similar appearance suggest several problematic narratives. First, she is childish by "playing" with a miniature animal and trying to ape its appearance and behavior. Second, she is similar to the elephant, primitive like the animal, and, because of her "ebony" skin, more distant from the human race. This second story also keeps Baker in the jungle, for not only does the image compare her to an animal, but an African animal, held in fascination by the Western world as "exotic.[27]" Third, and most problematically, the image suggests she is dominated like the elephant. Elephants and "exotic animal" imagery during the turn of the 20th century represents a prize for colonial success and domination. So once again, by likening Baker to the exotic, simple statue that could furthermore represent colonialism, the photo perpetuates a primitivist image of Baker that reinforces the agenda she supposedly subverted.

Finally: the banana dress. Like the image of the elephant, the bananas serve to liken Baker to the primitive, natural, jungle. They further remove her from humanity too because, during this era rife with racism and the pseudo-sciences of phrenology and "social Darwinism" still at large spreading their ideas of an "evolutionary hierarchy of

[27] although ironically, the Western elephant can represent both African primitivism as well as "romantic Eastern elegance" as in the Moulin Rouge's Indian elephant

races,"[28] a black woman clothed in bananas could instantly be recognized as "ape-like." Furthermore, the fruits are yet more examples of natural materials that act as stand-ins for clothing. They also allude to fertility and perpetuate sexuality and sexual dominance because the bananas hang upturned as nearly explicit phalluses that intrude upon her personal space and hang penetratingly close to her own pubic triangle. Author of *Paris: Biography of a City* describes most of Baker's costumes, most notably the banana dress as "hover[ing] uncomfortably on the cusp of obscenity"[29] and this obscenity, which through our contemporary lens we read as primitivism increases in her performances.

Footage of Baker performing the "banana dance" shows the dancer turning her back on the audience, gyrating wildly to make the bananas shake, hunching over, and isolating her hip muscles to thrust her pelvis back and forth. These motions are at once sexual and primitive; her aggressive thrust emphasizes fertility features, and she hunches, animalistic, and moves wildly. Most of Baker's solo dances found her on the floor of the stage, on all fours, and crawling, shaking, and lunging in all directions. *Zouzou Dancing With her Shadow* immediately epitomizes Baker's primitive image; the dancer begins by having a lively conversation with a crowd of white women, emphasizing the "blackness" of her features again by puffing out her cheeks and pushing forward her lips in exaggerated expressions of surprise and delight. The dance begins with Baker looking bashful and surprised at the presence of her shadow. She then plays with the shadow, pointing at it, giggling, and delightedly flexing her fingers apparently to see how the shadow will respond. As the dance progresses, Baker begins dancing excitedly with her shadow, crawling with hands and feet on the ground, ducking low,

[28] Waraich, "Cultures of 'Discovery' and Colonialism."
[29] Jones, *Paris*, 390.

and doing imitative ballet twirls clearly to be comical. Her expression remains fixed in a smile with incredulously raised eyebrows. Clearly the character is meant to be delighted and surprised by her shadow companion and this reaction further renders Baker, in the role of this character, as childish, simple, and notably, more of a novelty and a comedian than a dancer.

Images and Agendas: "The Hindu Courtesan"

On a similar plane, decades earlier, Mata Hari, born Margaret Gertrude Zelle[30] (or Margaretha Geertruida Zelle[31]) to a Dutch textile manufacturer forged another exotic path. Like Baker, Mata Hari actively appropriated Other aesthetics until her fall from grace. Griet, assumedly bored with her Dutch "petite bourgeoisie" life, answered a newspaper ad to marry a colonial military officer, Dutch Scottish Captain Rudolf McLeod. Griet McLeod, as she next called herself, moved with her new, considerably older husband to Java, where she bore him two children, lost her first son to food poisoning, and spent most of her time alone as McLeod perused his military work in regions around Dutch East Indies and the Iberian Peninsula.[32] The details of the woman's life remain relatively obscure; even early on, mystery remained Mata Hari's claim to fame. However, most accounts report that the transition of listless, loveless military wife to "Eye of the Dawn" courtesan and "exotic dancer" extraordinaire

[30] Alexander, *Heroic and Outrageous Women,* 225.
[31] Claude Conyers, "Courtesans in Dance History: Les Belles de la Belle Epoque." *Dance Chronicle,* 26 no. 2 (2003): 233.
[32] Conyers, "Courtesans," 235.

occurred when the McLeods' marriage fell apart.[33] Apparently to distract herself from a loveless, abusive marriage, Griet turned to Javanese erotic books, watched performers and dancing girls[34] and began to develop her own fantasy of "the romantic East." In 1902, McLeod publicly denounced his responsibility for wife and daughter, and Griet, in her final gesture as "Lady McLeod," left her daughter with a family in Holland[35] and traveled to Paris to "seek her fortune."[36] During this move, her transformation took place. As a wife and mother in Java, Hari had engaged in light reading and participation in Hindu studies, rituals, and performances, adopted Javanese dress, and performed unofficially as a temple dancer.[37] Upon her move to Paris, she extended her hobbies into an entirely new identity, inventing a myth for her life story and claiming to be a "half-caste Javanese"[38] dancer trained in the art of temple dancing, by priests and her fictitious Hindu mother, all dedicated to the worship of the god Siva.[39] She adopted the stage name "Mata Hari" which means "eye of the dawn."

Hari's dances relied on variations of her primary costume (figure 7). Sheaths of diaphanous veil-like cloth butterflied off the stiff plate of material covering her pelvis, as bangles, beads and pearls covered her ankles, wrists, upper arms and sometimes throat; metallic and jeweled breastplates concealed her bust, which she reportedly felt ashamed of;[40] and an "exotic" headdress curled in sparkling horn-like shapes off her head. The

[33] Conyers, "Courtesans," 236.
[34] Alexander, *Heroic and Outrageous Women,* 226.
[35] Alexander, *Heroic and Outrageous Women,* 226.
[36] Conyers, "Courtesans," 236.
[37] Conyers, "Courtesans," 236.
[38] Alexander, *Heroic and Outrageous Women,* 225.
[39] Alexander *Heroic and Outrageous Women*, 226.
[40] Conyers, "Courtesans," 236.

function of this primary outfit invited fantasies about eroticism, the East, and irresistibly merged the two. The long sheaths of cloth that composed her makeshift skirt informed the Western fantasies of the Eastern veil. The cloth, while suggesting the covering of Hari's body, ultimately called attention to it, teasing the audience by revealing her legs through artful pseudo concealment. Contradictory to the Eastern veils' true function as a protective marker of sophistication and an elite status symbol,[41] Western painters played with the idea of the veil as an alluring target for the male gaze, showing sensual "come hither" eyes peeking through cloth in archetypal harem images, just as Mata Hari's arched legs offers a "come hither" peak of flesh behind the thin membrane of her veil. Her dances too evoke the image of the harem. A striking comparison can in fact be made between Hari's body language and the tableaus she creates with her erotic dances and the archetypal salon images of harems. In one image, Hari stretches her arms luxuriously over her head, calling attention to her wide stretch of torso and arched back and casting her face out of focus (figure 8). A veiled "harem" of young women lay about her feet with submissively hunched postures and surface dead facial expressions. This motif appears in other Western fantasies of Harems too; Ingres's painting shows a presumed courtesan or odalisque (by Western connotation of the term[42]) with almost identical body language and setting to Hari's performance and space (figure 9). Hari's routine, therefore, plays directly into the appeal of Western-made harem images by recalling their motifs.

[41] Homa Hoodfar, "The Veil in Their Minds and on Our Heads: Veiling Practices and Muslim Women," *Women, Gender, Religion: A Reader,* Elizabeth Castelli, ed. (New York: Palgrave, 2001): 425.

[42] Odalisque, the term originally refers to a laundry or chamber maid

In Hari's 1905 Parisian debut, she performed privately at the home of Madame Kireyevsky and was quickly accepted and revered as an exotic "oriental" dancer.[43] Hari's self-constructed myth about being born to a Javanese temple dancer began successfully; her myth fooled most of her audiences as watchers commented that her eyes and ornately moving arms held her beauty and she possessed "eroticism [in] her olive-dark limbs."[44] The author of *Belle Epoque* describes her first dance as waves of "sculptural arms," "hands delicately pointed in Javanese fashion," "voluptuous heaving" and the one-by-one casting away of several veils until all that remained on her "tan figure" were "metallic breast cups and bejeweled adornment at the groin."[45] This secondary account, rich with sumptuous detail, highlights not only Hari's eroticism but her ability to perpetuate her legend. She sought roles and performance motifs that would highlight her exoticism, such as in her pursuit of playing Salome (figure 10), a biblical character already received as Other by Western audiences.[46] Salome also often appeared depicted with tableaus like the "dance of the seven veils," which emerges early from legend of Hindu goddess Ishtar of Babylonia.[47] According to Udo Kultermann, whose article "The Dance of the Seven Veils: Salome and Erotic Culture Around 1900" explains the different functions of Salome's myth in exotic dance, describes Hari as "manipulate[ing]

[43] Conyers, "Courtesans," 236.
[44] Alexander, *Heroic and Outrageous Women,* 227.
[45] Conyers, "Courtesans," 236.
[46] For more information on this topic consult Udo Kultermann's "The "Dance of the Seven Veils." Salome and Erotic Culture around 1900" which gives a thorough account of Salome and her significance in lore and on stage.
Udo Kultermann ,"The "Dance of the Seven Veils." Salome and Erotic Culture around 1900," Artibus et Historiae 27, No. 53 (2006).

[47] Kultermann,"Salome," 187.

her audience and her admirers by insinuating oriental traditions" and using "calculated nudity in her performances."[48] Kultermann further points out that female erotic dances that involve the gradual removal of veils "exploits the male gaze;"[49] this comment therefore assigns agency to Hari's performance technique and embeds her in the framework of sensual and successful "oriental dances."

Similarly, elements of Hari's outfit inform the Western fetish about the trapped, contained, and all manner of dominated exotic female body. Her tight jewelry suggests shackles the same way Harem images' grilled shutters and lattice windows suggest cages for the Eastern women within.[50] Her iconic metallic and constricting breast plates too recall any number of sexual fetishist images of "conquered women" such as the medieval chastity belt which many contemporary scholars question the full existence of, and the corset.[51] Mata Hari's time coincided with the corset's final era of reign, and the Edwardian discourse of corsetry reveals the corset's deviant subculture, the fixation on tight lacing and the corset as a cage.[52] Clearly, Hari's time witnessed the mass appeal of "trapped" or "dominated" female images, and her costumes played directly into this fetishist desire. Her nod to Javanese dress with an exaggerated sexual appeal apparently exploited the Western male ethos at the time which, as stated before, combines the Western desire to dominate the Nonwestern world with the archetypical male desire to

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[48] Kultermann, "Salome," 206.
[49] Kulterman, "Salome," 187.
[50] Waraich, Saleema, "Of Veils and Veiling in Western Imagination, Political Discourse, and Visual Culture," Lecture, Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, New York. October 7th, 2014.
[51] In one account, a group of "Oriental" "Harem" women crowd around a Western female tourist, concerned that her corset formed a kind of painful prison for her devised by her husband. Waraich, "Of Veils and Veiling."
[52] Valerie Steele, "The Corset Controversy," in *Fashion and Eroticism: Ideals of Feminine Beauty from the Victorian Era to the Jazz Age* (NY and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985) 177.

dominate women, creating an especially provocative and appealingly widespread image of the dominated exotic female body. Another photograph of Hari shows the performer wrapped tightly from head to toe in a white cloth (figure 11). Again, this image has a two tiered exoticism. First, the subject recalls images of Egyptian mummies, which perpetuates the stereotype that the "East" can be summarized piecemeal; it matters not whether Hari comes from India, Java, Egypt, or Thailand (as she sometimes also wore traditional Thai crowns) because she simply represents the "exotic East." Secondly, the cloth reinforces the appeal of bondage; Hari clearly couldn't walk let alone move in such a tight dress, and thus the photo constructs the image of a submissive exotic body, still and standing in wait of the Western male gaze.

The Initial Success: Fame and Adoration

Now that the specific characteristics of Baker and Hari's aesthetics and performances have been addressed, it is next important to acknowledge their apparent success before deconstructing their supposed triumphs. Baker's early career saw nothing but sheer admiration, reverence and obsession. So beloved was she that she received thousands of marriage proposals, attained enormous wealth and glamour, and was eventually offered an essential role as a secret agent for France in WWII for which she graciously accepted, claiming that "to Paris and France I owe eternal gratitude. They gave me their heart and I gave them mine…"[53] It has even been suggested that Baker's cheekiness extended to her willful appropriation of primitive aesthetics. Some claim that

[53] Alexander, *Heroic and Outrageous Women,* 480.

she was not remotely exploited by Western notions of a sexually primitive female, but rather herself exploited the Western male's fixation on exotic women and used it to her own advantage. Even commentators at the time posited that Baker might be subverting the notion of primitivism; one review suggested her dancing inspired "an acute response of the white masculine public in the capital of hedonism of all Europe—Paris."[54] Of note, Baker played an active role in creating her costumes. She describes having "gotten the idea" for the banana dress from different designers—scholars remain unsure who is completely responsible for each of her outfits, but the general consensus remains that Baker jumped at new contracts and new designs for her, and ultimately chose exotic costumes for herself, such as in her love for wearing Paul Poiret's famously orientalist high fashions.[55] Her wealth allowed her to indulge in several eccentricities, such as acquiring a private zoo. She had a pet cheetah which she led around on a leash (figure 12). The domesticated jungle animal under Baker's control flips the narrative of her primitivism; it could defiantly comment on the way her audience associated her with jungle animals. However ultimately the cheetah became yet another eccentricity of Baker as novelty fixture in Paris, rather than an acclaimed dancer. A lover of haut couture, Baker accumulated a large wardrobe of the latest fashions by the Western world's top designers, and admired architect Adolf Loos designed a large mansion for her.[56] Essentially, Baker's primitive costumes bought her fame, and that fame bought her the wealth and glamour that she would not have achieved in America, nor presumably as yet another white chorus dancer. Her race, eccentricity, charisma, and

[54] Sweeney, *From Fetish to Subject,* 42.
[55] Campbell, "Inventing Josephine."
[56] Elana, Shapira, "Dressing a Celebrity Adolf Loos's House for Josephine Baker," *Studies in the Decorative Arts,* 11 no. 2 (2004): 2.

skillful appropriation of Other dress gave her the unique status that afforded her the legacy scholars and pop culture[57] alike continue to remember her for.

Similarly, Mata Hari's persona mounted a huge success for a large portion of her admittedly brief career. She became one of Paris's most memorable and expensive courtesans and gained the "fortune" she sought both in France and in her subsequent travels throughout Europe. She demanded luxurious accommodations when traveling,[58] and while she "serviced" hundreds of men, also took lovers for herself and was never confined to a specific brothel. Unlike the common prostitute, Hari, as a mistress and courtesan was responsible for her own welfare and the agent in her own "business dealings." Photos from her performances further reveal her seemingly complete self image control. She maintained authority as the choreographed star and emphasized this stardom with a chorus of servant-like attendants and backup dancers. She too commissioned her own outfits. She is considered the primary designer of her most famous look, and went so far as to constantly protect the breasts she felt so ashamed of. Rumored to be abnormally small and peculiar looking, Hari invented and designed the metal breastplates that always concealed her bust and apparently never removed them, even while love making.[59] The fact that Hari refused to ever show her breasts, even to her paying customers, suggests her considerable control in her self-fashioning.

And as Baker's legacy persists with revelry and celebration, Hari's memory is similarly preserved by a feminist cult following that celebrates her subversion and autonomy. Berke's "Mata Hari in Saint Lazare Prison 1917" exemplifies the anti-heroism

[57] Singer Beyonce wore her own version of a banana dress for a 2006 concert
[58] Alexander, *Heroic and Outrageous Women,* 227.
[59] Conyers, "Courtesans," 238.

Hari's followers project onto her memory. The poem clearly sympathizes with Hari by presenting a romantic fiction of her final days from a first person perspective. Burke, speaking as Hari, writes, "They needed a witch, I thought, for destroying/to get their minds off how badly war goes" clearly highlighting Hari's relative innocence as the succeeding lines "Dance for me, my cell mates said…/…I realized/again, I had no country/the only country I ever had was my body"[60] illustrate a sympathetic, tragic figure.

The Falls from Greatness: Losing her Following and Losing her Head

It would seem, then, that Baker and Hari both successfully reversed the paradigm of the Western male controlling the exotic female image. They both independently constructed "othered" erotic female images for themselves and achieved so much professional success that it seems they did indeed "dismantle the master's house his own tools." Baker and Hari were the agents who, during both of their early careers, had nothing taken from them at all but instead took from the Western male patriarchy their attention, the agency, and their money. Commendable though these endeavors were, and unique and admirable as these two performers are remembered as, ultimately the endings of both their stories are tragedies. The Other images that they used to create themselves also destroyed them both.

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[60] Burke, *Mata Hari*.

Baker's downfall might not be as explicit as Hari's, whose life ended in a brutal execution, but it still contains tragedy and a sense of loss for the beauty of the life she created. First of all, her legacy today contains more fraught undertones than her initial stardom. While several biographies, such as "The Jazz Cleopatra" exist and celebrate Baker's achievements on stage and off, other criticisms of her work also exist, claiming, similar to this examination, that she fed directly into the struggling images of African Americans attempting and failing to escape early twentieth-century ideas of primitivism. In both cases, scholars interpret Baker's identity holistically and scholars give very little attention to analyzing her critically by discussing the successes and failures of her career. Josephine Baker continues to exist as a legend more than a person, and accounts of her life and work are almost entirely polarized as either glowing reviews or defaming chastisements. Those authors who attempt to "free her from the jungle" and explain how she as a performer evolved often fail to do the difficult task justice. In Constance L. Campbell's article about the supposed evolution of her costumes, the author claims that while she began as a primitivist performer, she eventually became so loved and respected that she shed the jungle image and appeared throughout her later life as the glamour queen she deserved to be seen as.[61] Even with the idealism of this argument notwithstanding, Campbell is still forced to concede that even in Baker's last performances on stage, she remained a primitive icon. When Baker reports that one of her fondest stage memories of these later performances "was the one in which, gowned in clinging silver lamé, I was borne onto the stage in a feather-trimmed litter which rested on the back of an enormous jade elephant," Campbell argues that while still

[61] Campbell, "Inventing Josephine."

"other," Baker transformed from the victim, as in the "Birds of the Forest" routine during which hunters pursue Baker clad in feathered wings, to the conqueror. I question this interpretation, for Baker still remains the fixation of the West's distant gaze into "other lands." The entrance-by-litter further demonstrates essentialism and willingness to read Africa as a single entity, mashing together the most romantic aesthetics from several of the different contrasting cultures that share the continent Comments on her performances insist on characterizing her as an exotic alternative to the banal qualities of Western culture. One admirer suggested, "who knows; perhaps your colorful feathers could save us from our time" while 1920s critic Fernand Devoire referred to Baker as "the virgin forest; to us a savage rejuvenation."[62] Both these comments acknowledge Baker's ultimate role as an amusing antidote to Western anxieties and boredom; neither admiration comments on her talent but rather her function for the Western viewer. She never achieved status as a Western performer, even though her immediate ties to Africa were no greater than Mata Hari's to Java. Baker's support and excitement about these motifs only reinforces her implicit downfall from grace in the loss of her fans over time and the absence of ever being taken seriously as a performer; perhaps she too was fooled by her own primitivism.

Campbell also claims that Baker's later garments, as examples of haut couture and high fashion, freed her from her primitivist status. The author, however, skirts around the potent fact that these later costumes were often white, such as her ermine in Queen of the Snows in the song "Magie Blanche" (significantly, White Magic) and that the narrative of whiteness and Baker's lack of whiteness had an authoritative voice in

[62] Sweeney, *From Fetish to Subject,* 42, 49.

these more "elegant" appearances. The author tries to redeem the song "If I were White" by claiming it's "Less racist than it might seem at first" thanks to its ending with "a statement of pride in who she was."[63] Campbell also argues that as Baker wears the fashions of Paul Poiret, she becomes an icon of contemporary fashion and not "othering."[64] Poiret, however, enjoyed Western prestige in the fashion world because of his iconic Orientalist garments. Poiret introduced turbans, "harem pants" and all means of fantasized Eastern dress into Western fashion, and Baker's eagerness to wear his clothing further indicates her self-trapping within the more exotic, eccentric, and "othered'" forms of popular culture.

Additionally, Baker's legacy didn't necessarily remain as celebrated as certain contemporary scholars attempt to express it. While Baker lived her life largely loved and adored by Paris, she in later life fell into obscurity and was forgotten by her once-admirers. This fate seems largely due to her status as a novelty act. She may have epitomized the 1920s in Paris, but once the 20s ended, the world moved on without Baker. Her spendthrift habits with her fortune resulted in her ultimate destitution and despair. She lost her castle as well as her crown, giving up her property and appearing on stage in later life only intermittently and with much less support than she once enjoyed. Baker (and Hari's) exotic erotic characters failed to take one key variable into consideration: age. As time passed, Baker inevitably lost her innocent gamine charm, and because of the comedy, sexuality, and novelty of her acts, her charisma with age had less staying power. Loved though she was, Baker never found respect, and so comparatively little admiration was to be had for an older "black Venus."

[63] Campbell, "Inventing Josephine."
[64] Campbell, "Inventing Josephine."

Mata Hari's downfall didn't just result in a fall from grace but in fact lead directly to her death. Hari was accused of and imprisoned for espionage, executed by firing squad and posthumously beheaded. Her embalmed, decapitated head remained on display in the Parisian Museum of Anatomy until the late twentieth century which, by defiling and making a trophy of her dead body, certainly reveals the urgency for emphasizing Hari's infamy. While recent evidence points to the fact that Hari most likely did not act as a spy,[65] the impulse to execute her—what Burke's poem implies is a "witch hunt"—became impressively strong. Since Mata Hari's true identity was a Dutch middle class woman, and since she insisted that her enormous fortune came entirely from her lovers and paying customers, what provoked so much loathing and so much suspicion about her character? I believe the answer remains in the question. Mata Hari's costumes and the character that evolved around them led her directly to the firing squad. The ambiguity of her past was the very thing that made her so questionable. Her changing accents and inauthenticity when performing Hindu dances invited enough skepticism to render her an untrustworthy figure. A fellow ballerina, Carlotta Zambelli once distainfully told a stage manager "[Hari] is as much an Indian dancer as I am a Chinese waiter!"[66] Even more aggressively, a telegram from Italian Intelligence sent to Paris authorities detailing a list of names aboard a Japanese vessel in Naples sent August 4th 1914 describes a passenger "…named Mata Hari, the famous Hindu dancer [and at this point prostitute], who purports to reveal secret Hindu dances which demand complete nudity. She has, it seems, renounced her claim to Indian birth and

[65] Alexander, *Heroic and Outrageous Women,* 230.
[66] Conyers, "Courtesans," 238

become Berlinoise. She speaks German with a slight Eastern accent."[67] The tone of this report suggests skepticism in her identity, and this ambiguity kindled an anxiety that made her the target of a World War II "witch hunt."

While the ambiguity of her heritage and the complex nature of her profession as a courtesan and mistress would represent plenty of reasons to stir the suspicions of the French government, I believe her assumed identity as an ambiguously Eastern Hindu had the most to do with her fatal fall. Her chosen persona as an East Asian woman who also appropriated Near Eastern imagery may have sparked more aggression and defensiveness in her accusers than it would have if she had successfully perpetuated the ruse of being, perhaps, African or from an Indigenous North or South American region. While the Western mind still sought to dominate and assumed successful dominance over all nonwestern cultures, the Near East and the Muslim World made Western imperialists the most uneasy. While Hari did perpetuate the persona of a Javanese, Indian, and Hindu woman, and also occasionally wore traditional Thai dresses, she kept her "exotic East" persona somewhat ambiguous and clearly took some inspiration from the Near East in addition to South East Asia where she once lived. Gauguin's victimized Tahitian woman and Baker's African jungle "darling" status suggest the West felt more at ease in their domination of these Non-Western regions. There exists some safety in the Western prescribed barbarism and primitivism of Baker, but the West met the Muslim and Hindu worlds with far more fear and anxiety. Hari, therefore, tacitly recalled the historical Western fears of the "devious, sneaky Arab"[68] and the more

[67] Alexander, *Heroic and Outrageous Women,* 227.
[68] Waraich, "Cultures of "Discovery" and Colonization."

difficult-to-control/understand regions of East Asia, bringing her more infamy and a greater punishment than Baker suffered.

Part II: The "Redemptive" Evolution of Today's Art World

Ultimately the Western exotic dancer's attempt to dismantle the patriarchal house with its own misogynist tools was unsuccessful, at the very least during this imperialist era. While these two performers attempted to subvert the ways exotic Other women were controlled and dominated, these attempts, by appropriating and reconfiguring the aesthetic of that dominated archetype, ultimately and counterintuitively fed right back into the hand of Orientalism and contributed to what I consider these women's downfalls. The story does not end with these case studies, however. As the rest of the twentieth century continued to grapple with these issues of depicting the "female other," and films like the 1963 *Cleopatra* starring a glittering and turquoise Elizabeth Taylor (figure 13) seem to keep the image statically situated in orientalism, evolution still unquestionably took place.

In recent years, contemporary artists have undertaken the task of further deconstructing and now revising the female Other and "female outsider" by forcing their audiences to readdress the history that established this damaged archetype. The illustrations of American born artist Amy Cutler (1974-) immediately engage their viewers in an conversation about the identity of the "female other." Cutler uses primarily a limited palette of watercolor and gouache on paper to create detailed drawings of female ensembles in strange, magical-realist settings. Her women often drudge in laborious tasks such as laundry, farming, weaving, ironing, working in

markets, and traveling long distances with cargo on their backs. They also become strange with comically long hair, floating or removed body parts, or unlikely companions such as elephants on stilts and clouds with arms assisting them with the clothes line. Several formal elements of Cutler's work embed her recurring female figures in the discussion of the female Other, however Cutler's work remains distinct thanks to her conviction that she has no goal in addressing female identity or Othered identities, let alone the marriage between the two. This very principle of Cutler's makes her work the most necessary for this discussion of female Otherness. Out of a wide range of contemporary artists tackling old yet pervasive issues of female Other identity, Cutler rejects her role as a self-aware nay-sayer of old artistic traditions and instead enters new territory and proposes fresh ways of seeing.

Today we witness postmodern artists approach the legacies of material culture through an often critical lens. Artist Kara Walker, who as a young female artist working with "art historical" ideas[69] often gets compared to and lumped beside Amy Cutler, quite literally takes on "the master's tools" through her choice in medium. She uses the cut paper silhouettes of Southern gentility to re-imagine the Civil War Era South, emphasizing the horrors of American slavery through grotesquely salacious imagery. Her piece from an exhibition aptly titled *Presenting Negro Scenes Drawn Upon my Passage Through the South and Reconfigured for the Benefit of Enlightened Audiences Wherever Such May Be Found, By Myself, Missus K. E. B. Walker, Colored* (figure 14) for instance, makes tremendous use of caricatured "negroid" faces, sodomy, and the

[69] Sarah Kirk Hanley, "Tales of Our Time: Amy Cutler's Prints," *Ink,* art21 (December 9th, 2011).

supercilious costume of white Victorian Americans, complete with a comically large and awkward crinoline and an oversized top hat. From its ironic title to its cringe-worthy content, this and other pieces by Walker exemplify a new direction that artists take in addressing the "outcast" or Other(ed) female.

Amy Cutler's drawings, paintings and prints, according to the artist, do not share Walker's goals, however. While Kara Walker's work in all its explicit discomfort might seem the perfect antidote to such perverse misrepresentations of female/racial identity as Josephine Baker's banana dance, Amy Cutler's work offers similar, yet distinct and perhaps more productive insight in to how to reconcile the female Other The agitation of imagery like Walker's completes the necessary task of identifying a problem, but Cutler's work more directly approaches a solution. Cutler doesn't scold history or pay solemn tribute to past horrors but carries her audience into an abstract world of strangeness and optimism. Her so-called "meaning-free" illustrations and their playful refusal to function as cautionary tales makes them opportunistic and develop an alternative way to depict the female Other or, in some cases, remove the archetype altogether.

From the examples of Baker and Hari, evidence suggests she who seeks control of her gender and aligns at all with the visual rhetoric of being Other faces a problematic fate. Amy Cutler's subjects, however, exist in a world apart from ours and depart from the traditional viewing of the Other female. In fact Cutler's fictitious women cannot fully be considered "others." Their partial identity as women of working class status and of nonwestern origins remain apparent in her use of recognizable attributes, such as props and dress, yet somehow these women do not inhabit the same downfall narrative. They toil but do not fail. They do not disappear. She denies that her work carries feminist

weight but concedes that her female subjects are not without a purpose.[70] She views the scenes she creates as utopias;[71] her women inhabit dreamscapes where nothing can rip them apart. Arguably, Cutler's work speaks against characterizing the female Other and her women function as models of female agency in a way that Mata Hari, Josephine Baker, and today's contemporary conversation only ever sought to be but never fully realized. If, then, Cutler's women are not "others," what are they and how does she use the same visual language to tell a different visual story? She replaces sexuality with a tactile sensitivity replaces precious fantasy with awkward imagination, and uses all the trappings of the Othered female depiction to create a sense of self, free from the notion of value judgment, and leaves no an emotional conclusion for audiences to draw from her narratives.

One striking connection between my task of deconstruction the female Other and Cutler's selected imagery appears in her most well-known *Tiger Mending* (figure 15). This work at a glance provokes the label of "Nonwestern" but not necessarily of Other. The linear cut of the women's dresses alludes to the Western interpretation of kimonos, the women's straight, black hair falls out of buns, and their features, tiger sewing projects, the scrub of unrecognizable foliage, and the compositional flatness that recalls Japanese woodblock and Mughal miniatures[72] all suggest to the Western viewer that the scene takes place in a hybrid of East and South Asia. However, the female faces in both renderings remain downcast and focused on their work, refusing to allow themselves to be the focus of the work. Their bodies remain covered, by both the long sleeves of their

[70] Hanley, "Amy Cutler's Prints."
[71] Hanley, "Amy Cutler's Prints."
[72] Hanley, "Amy Cutler's Prints."

garments and the bodies of the tigers that sprawl on their laps; this treatment of a nonwestern female form remains unique to Cutler's images. A hallmark in exotic "Eastern" images of women has long included strategic display of skin and eye-catching adornment, both absent from Cutler's tiger menders. Like Mata Hari appropriated different gestures and garment details from various "exotic cultures" to construct a hybrid "oriental-Hindu" "goddess," Cutler too blurs the lines of regional-dress accuracy through hybrid dress that uses Western patchwork designs against Eastern shapes. That said, in covering rather than uncovering the women she dresses, Cutler creates an innocuous union of these vague elements, foiling Hari's eroticized essentialism. While both artists use the same technique of combining dress and creating fantasy garments, they represent different goals. Mata Hari's focus insisted on being enticingly Other whereas Amy Cutler's women engage in busy tasks and simply need to be dressed. As further evidence of the "non-otherness" of a motif historically represented as Other, contemporary fiction writer Aimee Bender wrote a short story inspired and named after Cutler's piece. Bender did not, however, keep the races of the women the same but rather narrated the story from an American perspective and focused instead on the mending of the tigers.[73] This set of priorities matches Cutler's goal of not highlighting the Otherness of her subjects.

While Cutler continues to claim her work lacks emotional meaning, her inspiration comes from stirring sources that further connect her images to the idea of positive alternatives to past instances of Othering. In addition to folklore and fairy tale,

[73] Aimee Bender, "Tiger Mending," in *The Color Master: Stories.* (New York: Doubleday, Random House Inc., 2013).

the artist reports she feels inspired by the intensity of current events.[74] *Tiger Mending* partially began as Cutler's processing an NPR story on the beginning of the Iraq War[75] which addresses her desire to counter violent acts of mankind with "utopias of women." But not only the Iraq War inspired *Tiger Mending* and its additional source, the Mughal miniature painting *Akbar Slays a Tigress that Attacked the Royal Entourage* (figure 16) creates a striking connection.[76] Cutler describes her interpretation of the piece as not celebratory as was its intention, but a "battle over territory"[77] and therefore sought to employ women to repair the damages to the flayed tigers through delicate stitching. The story of *Tiger Mending* ends here for Cutler, but the significance of the two images can be explored further. Cutler's decision to use only female subjects in all her work but particularly in *Tiger Mending* contrasts the all-male cast of *Akbar*. She also selects a group of women crouched relatively still over a task, creating a direct contradiction of the vibrant motion and focus on one male figure in *Akbar*. Therefore, by creating a "solution" image inspired by a "problem" image, Cutler's piece implies the solution to a single violent male entity is a community of uninterrupted working women. This idea speaks to an anti-imperialist view. Akbar's image speaks of celebrating the young emperor's first conquest and honoring the "shrewd stratagem" of the "royal hunt."[78] Likely this and other Mughal images of the emperor's military glory aimed at stirring support for and aggrandizing the empire. But *Tiger Mending* argues that empires invite no celebration but merely create chaos. Cutler's tiger menders are the "anti-empire;" she

[74] Hanley, "Amy Cutler's Prints."
[75] Hanley, "Amy Cutler's Prints."
[76] Hanley, "Amy Cutler's Prints."
[77] Hanley, "Amy Cutler's Prints."
[78] Susan Stronge, "Illustrating the Akbarnama," in *Painting For the Emperor: Art of the Book 1560-1660.* (London: V&A Publishers, 2002): 62.

reverses the conquest of an autocratic male to the quiet grief of a group of women, cultural opposites in the history of empires. Cutler emphasizes this polarity in her sepia rendering's background figures. They appear to be horseback riders, heaving great whips or weapons overhead as they presumably charge across the far landscape. But the female menders remain ignorant and therefore alienate the small procession of perhaps soldiers. In particular the uppermost mender extends her arm widely over the tiger she works on, creating a horizontal barrier of protection between the female party and the advancing horseback party. A viewer might even interpret the central horseback figure as a tiny Akbar, obsolete and unremarkable as the female menders correct his violent work.

Tiger Mending shares several themes with the rest of Cutler's body of work. Consistently, the artist choses to present the female Other through iconography we associate with, for instance, Mata Hari's "romantic East" exoticism and Josephine Baker hyper-"natural" primitivism but then removes her label as Other or "outsider." She uses emblems of "exotic" non-western culture and "primitive" folk and peasant culture to decorate her female subjects, but manages to keep them in their own dreamlike world of ambiguity, rather than our world of "othering." *Widow's Peak* (figure 17) and *Handmaidens* (figure 18) both depict artifacts recognizable as nonwestern, yet rather than the traditional uses within Orientalism and exoticism, these elements appear in service of Cutler's whimsical fantasy of a "women's world." They do not appear as tools for expressing cultural difference. In *Widow's Peak,* women with mountain goats perched on their heads struggle up a set of foggy peaks, clutching Tibetan prayer flags for support. The landscape of rocky mountain tops and bare trees coupled with the prayer flags instantly suggest this scene takes place perhaps in the Himalayas. Yet

Cutler's commitment to a fantasy but not "othered" world holds strong. The women again appear in composite dress that bear resemblance to several different cultures. The topmost woman's bodice echoes a samurai plate of armor while the figure closest to the viewer appears to wear a large hoop earring, an elaborate set of metal on her bodice, and a dark patchwork reminiscent of Russian fairytale art on her sleeves. In this illustration, Cutler reverses the idea of enticing female figures against the ambiguous backdrop of the "romantic East." Cutler renders "The East" in question explicitly and clearly, while the female figures remain ambiguous. Additionally, by removing traditional sexual appeal from these women by covering their bodies and physically attaching them to their landscape—the skirts eventually morph into the rocky peaks the women appear to climb—Cutler frees her women from "the gaze." The result frees the widows from "otherness" because the Other relies on the gaze of the self to exist.

Likewise, *Handmaidens* employs recognizable Japanese imagery including the characteristic wood paneling on the walls and tatami-like floor, the soft pallet of flower and nature patterns covering all the robe-like garments, the blue and white ceramic pot in the foreground, and the flower filled up-dos with strings of loose hair that vaguely recall the West's interpretations of Geisha hairstyles. Exoticism and eroticism remain absent however. Again, Cutler removes the sexuality of the women by protecting their bodies with full coverage. In this image, she covers the central figure in a blue robe or dress, while the hand maidens have invisible bodies. The only parts that stay in sight have active agency; their floating heads allow the women sight and communication, and their hands perform some kind of meticulous task. This representation deeply contrasts imperial images of "exotic" female like Mata Hari. In Orientalist works of art, often the hands and heads are the very body parts artists seek to remove from their female

subjects. Artists often show exotic female wrists as manacled, implying a lack of hand freedom and veils often cover the face and/or hair, paying little or no mind to the context in which women might actually wear veils. Mata Hari's costumes have almost the opposite impact as the hand maidens'. Hari sometimes veiled her face and wore elaborate bangles and shackles on her wrists and ankles, sometimes even attaching fabric to her wrist cuffs which further limited her range of motion. The hand maiden's bodiless nature emphasizes that their bodies do not exist for display; their heads and hands, the tools of women's work, become the focus by omission.

Just as Cutler deconstructs exoticism by removing any trace of sexuality from her nonwestern motifs, she too dismantles primitivism through grotesque hyperbole and confusing depictions of peasant labor. Her work entitled *Exports* (figure 19) engages the primitive peasant Other as women in vaguely traditional peasant costume toil about a fish market under the minimal cover of crude structures of wooden beams and straw roofs. The roofs even carry some detailed pattern work the color scheme and geometric registers of which recall weaving and pottery decorating styles of so called "primitive" or "tribal" art. The women wear similar garments complete with bonnet-like head covers suggesting they wear a kind of uniform or are in some way a homogenous unit. This sameness motif appears often in primitivism, from the tradition of depicting peasants as a mass of identical brutes to applying this problematic mode to people of the same race. But, countering the primitivising of a mass of poor women, Cutler introduces fantasy to counter a specific read on her image. One figure floats down from a roof and embraces a grounded figure in a kiss. The interaction invites a whimsical and/or optimistic read rather than a strictly primitivist one. This moment bears a striking resemblance to Chagall's *The Birthday* (figure 20) by employing his iconic use of floating figures and

technique of depicting a more nuanced/magical than primitive rural peasant existence. In addition to the floating figure sharing a kiss with a grounded figure, *Exports* and *The Birthday* both include almost identical intricate "primitive" patterned craftwork in the backgrounds. Likening Cutler's work to Chagall's expresses Cutler's further engagement with the markings of the Other and yet her refusal to let her images invite the typical conclusion.

Cutler's off-beat yet light-hearted handling of peasant imagery persists throughout her body of work, further divorcing the "primitive peasant woman" archetype from its "othering" roots. Notably, *Garnish* (figure 21) and *Overcast* (figure 22) invite a read of Cutler's women as poor. The patchwork and "folk-like" patterns of their clothes as well as their ruddy faces and strings of loose hair all suggest that they toil and labor as peasants, but not as "pretty peasants"[79] or of the salacious "bestial beauty" that labeled Josephine Baker. These women inhabit a similar world to primitivism but remain distinct and ambiguous thanks to Cutler's use of uncomfortable magical realism. In *Garnish,* the female figure interacts with anthropomorphic, clothed pigs, which could allegorize any number grueling tasks women endure. In *Overcast,* a cloud with arms aids the exhausted women with their laundry. In both scenarios, the plain, scruffy women could be made Other if they were left helplessly alone in their drudgery, but as with the lack of sexuality freed the hand maidens from exoticism, the lack of essential, "natural" simplicity carries Cutler's peasant women onto a different plane of understanding. Cutler's imagery further lifts her female figures from

[79] Again, gratitude to Grizelda Pollock's "Van Gogh and the Poor Slaves" for fleshing out this archetype in a feminist context. Pollock's analysis of how nineteenth century painters depict female peasants matches how nineteenth century painters depicted "exotic" and "oriental" women. Both modes of representation romanticize, sexualize, and fetishize an "othered" body.

primitivism as they become so magically absurd that any notion of specific otherness disappears. Such an event takes place in *Ida, Ina, Oona*. This image of female peasantry—as recognizable again by their simple traditional dress of a dirty chemise under a patterned jumper and often with an apron—becomes near-fairytale as the small peasant women approach three fenced in giantesses, presumably Ida, Ina and Oona from left to right. Ida, Ina, and Oona's faces contort into lined grimaces removing any implication of eroticism but the small figures around the giantesses interact with them easily. Apart from the wooden fences that encircle the giantesses' skirts (and even these barriers appear permeable as small figures navigate in and around them), the grey-scale pallet, symmetrical composition, and even line density visually unite the small and large women, underlining Cutler's goal to create a female utopia. The magic of giantess presence removes the scene from any primitivist peasant reading and creates instead an unclear narrative that is, thanks to is magical realism rather than out-right witchcraft, more complex than a folk or fairy tale.

While Cutler's work successfully begins to deconstruct the "female other," her images neither seek to nor succeed in correcting the problems so long imposed by the Western imperial patriarchy. She still seems to question the existence or acceptance of a female figure completely in control. Her characters work and work hard; they don't encounter let alone answer to men and always appear together, connected and not isolated from each other. Yet they also remain the product of their own toil. Cutler's elaborate series on weaving always shows women using fantastically long fibers (Figure 24) and only in some renderings can the viewer realize that the skeins of fiber are always hair still connected to other women's scalps (figure 25). Stacks of pots and pans and steaming heaps of laundry follow Cutler's women in nearly every image. Her women

may be free but they are never at rest. These recurring motifs of Cutler's convey to the viewer that our work towards feminism remains unfinished. She unravels the "otherness" of the female Other but keeps her women engaged in strict "women's work." On some level, she celebrates their (our) meticulous skills at handcraft[80] but still forbids them from unwinding from the separate world they live in. The question she leaves us with follows: is the "otherless" yet isolated female world of her fantasies preferable to Hari's and Baker's worlds, or do we continue to seek a setting in which to begin developing "the female self?"

[80] Hanley, "Amy Cutler's Prints

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Appendix

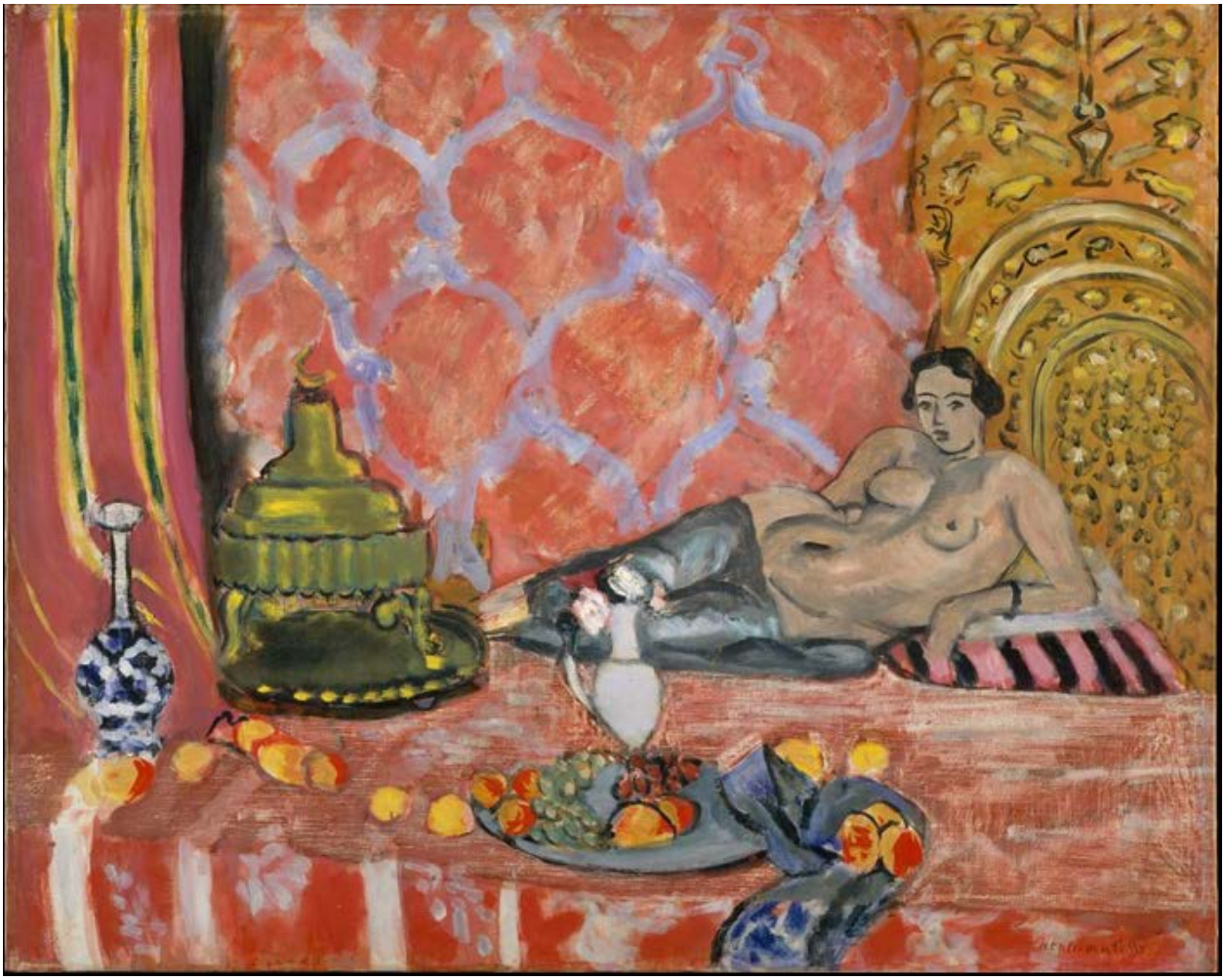

Figure 1: Matisse Henri, *Reclining Odalisque in Gray Culottes*. 1927. Oil on canvas.

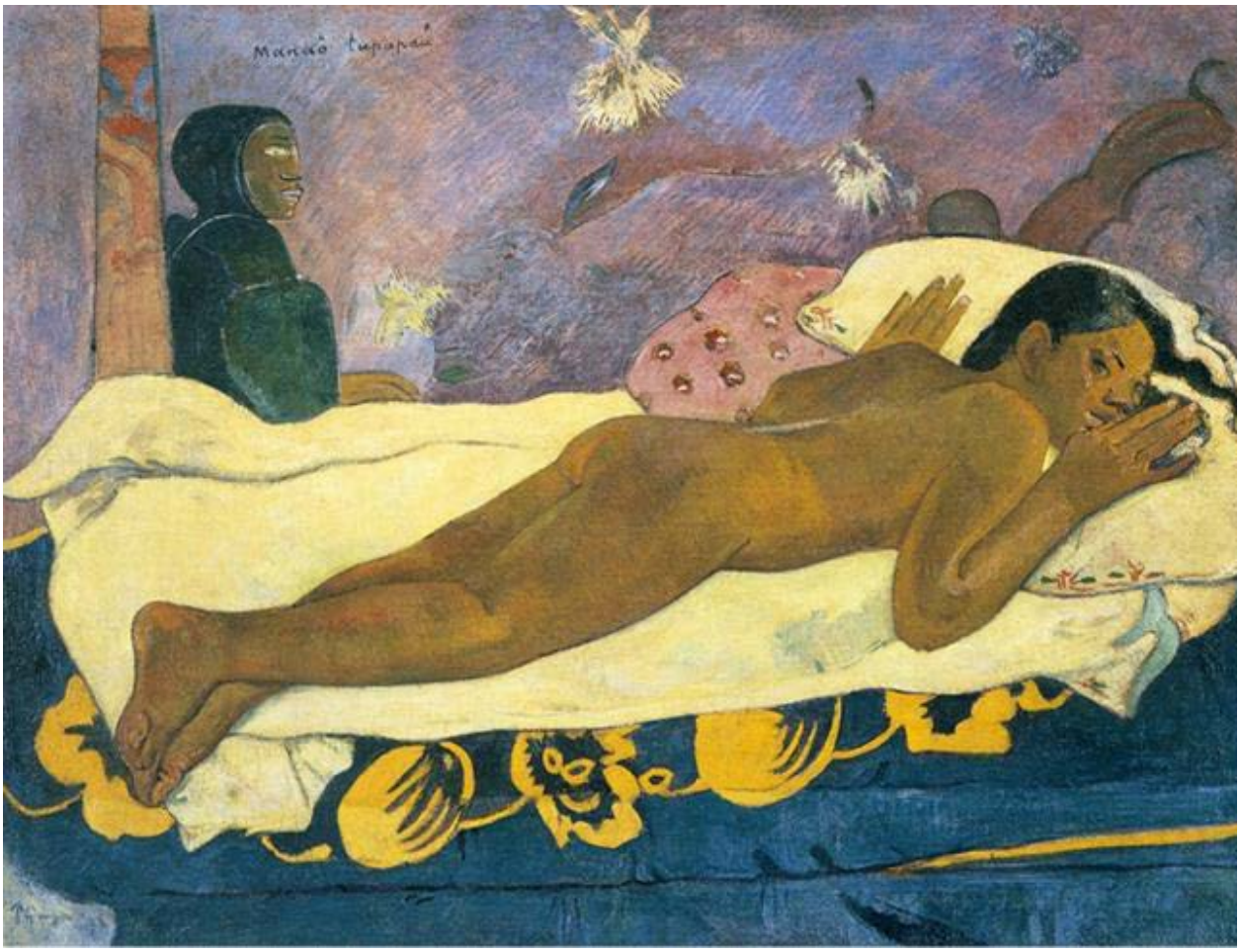

Figure 2: Gaugin, Paul. *Manao Tupapau*. 1892. Oil on canvas. 72.5 x 92.5 cm.

Figure 3: Picasso, Pablo. *Demoiselles D'Avignon*. 1907. Oil on canvas. 243.9 x 233.7 cm.

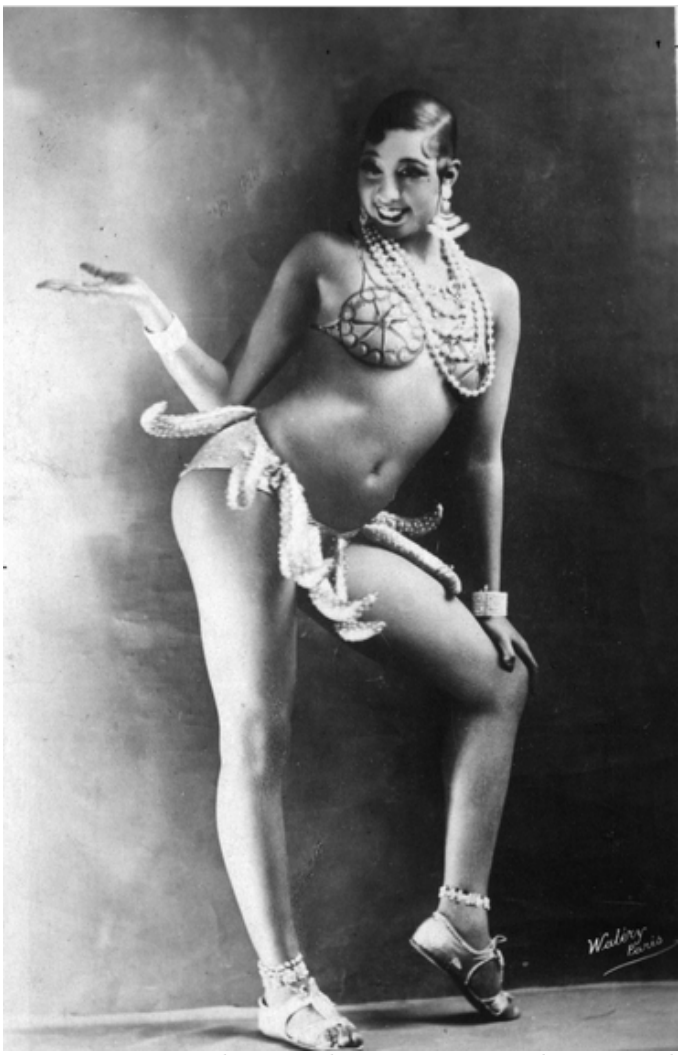

Figure 4: Josephine Baker. ca. 1925. Photograph.

Figure 5: Josephine Baker. Photograph.

Figure 6: Josephine Baker with elephant. Photograph.

Figure 7: Mata Hari, iconic dance costume. Photograph.

Figure 8: Mata Hari in performance. 1905. Photograph.

Figure 9: Ingres, Jean-Auguste-Dominique. *Odalisque with Slave*. 1839. Oil on canvas. 28 x 39 3/8 inches.

Figure 10: Mata Hari as Salome. Ca 1907. Photograph.

Figure 11: Mata Hari. Photograph. Life Magazine.

Figure 12: Josephine Baker. Photograph.

Figure 13: Elizabeth Taylor as Cleopatra. 1963. Film still from *Cleopatra*.

Figure 14: Walker, Kara. *Presenting Negro Scenes Drawn Upon my Passage Through the South and Reconfigured for the Benefit of Enlightened Audiences Wherever Such May Be Found, By Myself, Missus K. E. B. Walker, Colored*. 1997, installation, The Renaissance Society at The University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois, United States.

Figure 15: Cutler, Amy. *Tiger Mending (two variations)*.

Figure 16: Basawan (outline and portraits, maker) and Tara (the Elder) (painting, maker). *Akbar*. ca. 1586 - ca. 1589, opaque watercolour and gold on paper, Victoria and Albert Museum.

Figure 17: Cutler, Amy. *Widow's Peak*.

Figure 18: Cutler, Amy. *Handmaidens*.

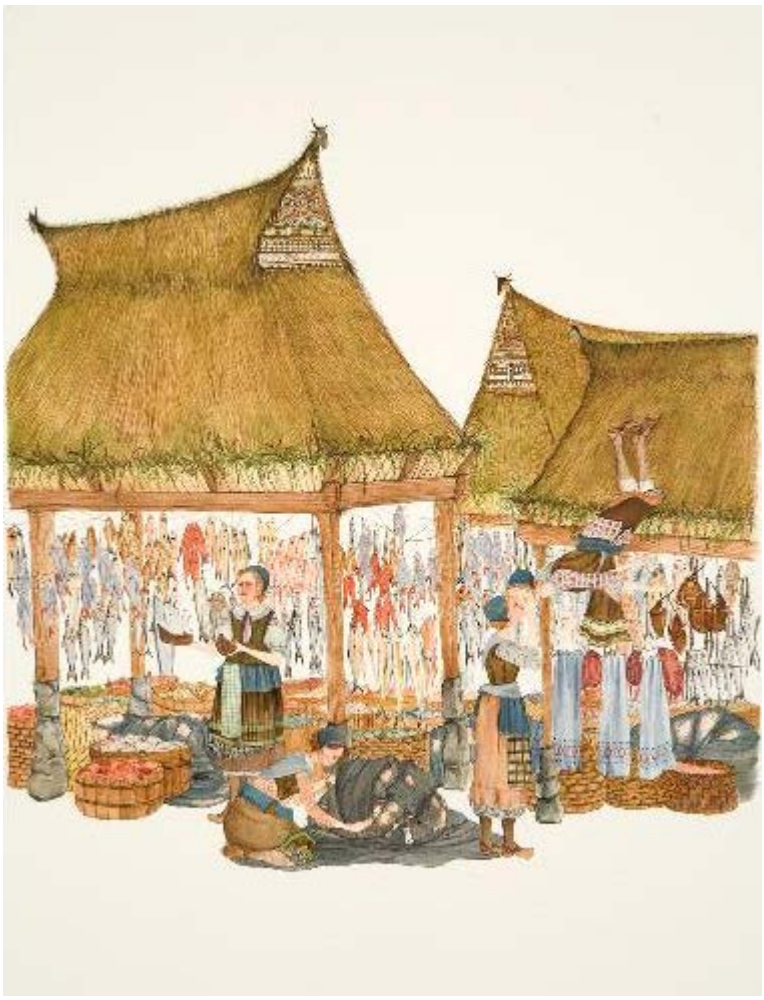

Figure 19: Cutler, Amy. *Exports*

Figure 20: Chagall, Marc. *The Birthday*.

Figure 21: Cutler, Amy, *Garnish*, 2014, gouache on paper, 12 7⁄8 x 10 1⁄2 in

Figure 22: Cutler, Amy, *Overcast,* 2012, gouache on watercolor paper, 13 1⁄2 x 10 1⁄8 in

Figure 23: Cutler, Amy. *Ida, Ina, Oona*, 2009, Intaglio in one color with chine-collé on Gampi applied to Hahnemuhle paper, 19 1/8 in. x 21 in. (48.58 cm x 53.34 cm)

Figure 24: Cutler, Amy. *Weavers*. 2008, Lithograph in 17 colors on Rives BFK gray paper, 34 1/8 in. x 24 1/8 in.

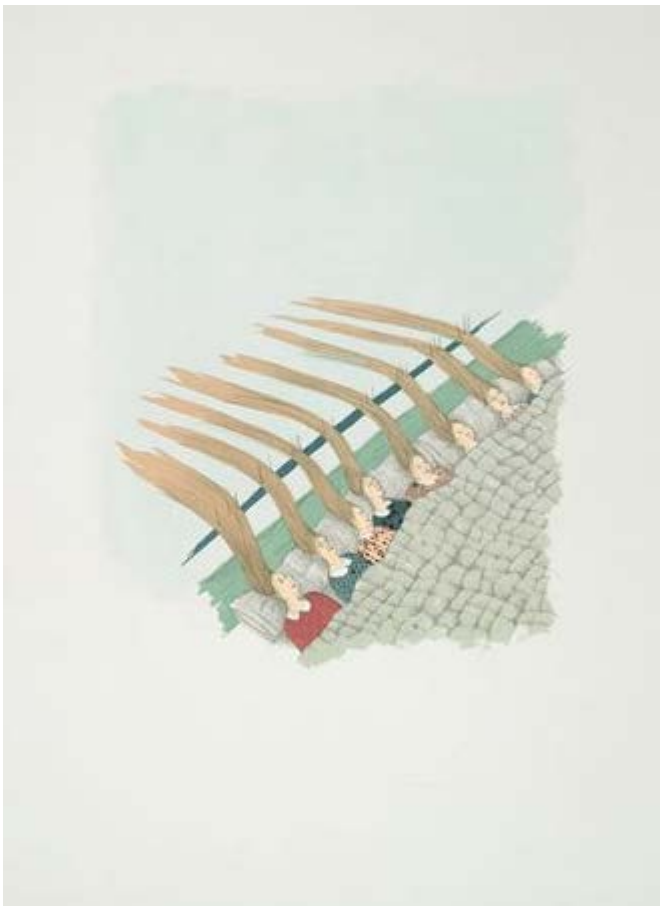

Figure 25: Cutler, Amy. *Provisions*. 2008. Lithograph in 15 colors on Rives BFK gray paper
34 1/8 in. x 24 1/8 in.

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